The Theatre of Anon:

Julia Margaret Cameron, Virginia Woolf, 
and the Performance of 

Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*

Joan Virginia Melville

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Table of Contents**  
i-ii  
List of Images  
iii  
Abbreviations of Titles  
viii  
Dedication  
ix  
**Introduction**  
1  
**Chapter One:** Julia Margaret Cameron and Alfred Tennyson  
26  
*Annals of My Glass House*  
33  
Cameron’s Book of Theatrical Scenes  
55  
**Chapter Two:** Virginia Woolf and Julia Margaret Cameron  
69  
Family Ties  
72  
Woolf Writes about Cameron and Tennyson  
95  
“The Searchlight”  
116  
**Chapter Three:** King Arthur and the Theatre of Anon  
134  
The Influence of Arthurian Chivalry  
135  
Woolf’s “Contra-dictionary of National Biography”  
158  
Woolf and the Optical Unconscious  
178  
Anon’s Community Theatre  
184  
Cameron, Woolf, and the Genre of Pageant  
198  
**Chapter Four:** Reading the *Illustrations* with Woolf  
212  
Beginnings  
243
Open-Ear Reading: Consequences of the Daybird’s Chuckle 270
Cameron’s *Miniature Edition* and Sisterhood 282

**Chapter Five:** Dreams and Endings 287

The *Princess* 296
Valedictions 320
Afterwork 346

**Chapter Six:** A Facsimile Edition

The Photographs of Cameron’s *Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King* and *Other Poems*:

Volumes One & Two, and the *Miniature Edition* 356

**Works Cited** 421

**Works Consulted** 441

**Appendices**

Appendix A: Cameron and Tennyson’s Autobiographies

*Annals of My Glass House* 455

“Merlin and the Gleam” 467

Appendix B: Additional Images 471
List of Illustrations

Chapter Six:

Cameron’s *Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems*

Volume One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 1</td>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 3</td>
<td>Sonnet</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 4</td>
<td>“The Dirty Monk”</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 5</td>
<td>“Gareth and Lynette”</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6</td>
<td>“Gareth and Lynette”</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 7</td>
<td>“Geraint and Enid”</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 8</td>
<td>“Enid”</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 9</td>
<td>“Geraint and Enid”</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 10</td>
<td>“And Enid Sang”</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 11</td>
<td>“Merlin and Vivien”</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 12</td>
<td>“Vivien and Merlin”</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 13</td>
<td>“Merlin and Vivien”</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 14</td>
<td>“Vivien and Merlin”</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 15</td>
<td>“Lancelot and Elaine”</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 16</td>
<td>“Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat”</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 17</td>
<td>“Lancelot and Elaine”</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 18</td>
<td>“So in her tower alone the maiden sat”</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 19</td>
<td>“The Holy Grail”</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 20</td>
<td>“Sir Galahad and the Nun”</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 21: “Guinevere” 378
Fig. 22: “The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere” 379
Fig. 23: “Guinevere” 380
Fig. 24: “King Arthur” 381
Fig. 25: “Guinevere” 382
Fig. 26: “The Little Novice and the Queen in the Holy House at Almesbury” 383
Fig. 27: “The Passing of Arthur” 384
Fig. 28: “The Passing of Arthur” 385

Volume Two

Fig. 29: Title Page 387
Fig. 30: Dedication 388
Fig. 31: Sonnet 389
Fig. 32: Frontispiece 390
Fig. 33: “The May Queen” 391
Fig. 34: “For I’m to be Queen of the May, Mother” 392
Fig. 35: “New Year’s Eve” 393
Fig. 36: “He thought of that sharp look Mother I gave him yesterday” 394
Fig. 37: “The End” 395
Fig. 38: “The End” 396
Fig. 39 “The Princess” 397
Fig. 40: “The Princess” 398
Fig. 41: “The Princess” 399
Fig. 42: “The Splendour Falls on Garden Walls” 400
Fig. 43: “The Princess” 401
Fig. 44: “Tears, Idle Tears” 402
Fig. 45: “Mariana” 403
Fig. 46: “Mariana” 404
Fig. 47: “The Beggar Maid” 405
Fig. 48: “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid” 406
Fig. 49: “Lancelot and Elaine” 407
Fig. 50: “Elaine” 408
Fig. 51: “Lancelot and Elaine” 409
Fig. 52: “The Corpse of Elaine in the Palace of King Arthur” 410
Fig. 53: “The passing of Arthur” 411
Fig. 54: “King Arthur wounded lying in the barge” 412
Fig. 55: “Maud” 413
Fig. 56: “Maud” 414

Miniature Edition

Fig. 57: “Sonnet by Charles Turner (Tennyson)” 416
Fig. 58 “The Childhood of Alice and Effie” 417
Fig. 59: “Guinevere” 418
Fig. 60: “Guinevere” 419
Fig. 61: “The Gardener’s Daughter” 420
Fig. 62: “The Gardener’s Daughter” 421
Additional Images

Appendix B

Fig. 63: “Isabella and the Pot of Basil” 473
Fig. 64: “Pre-Raphaelite Study” 474
Fig. 65: “Annie, my first success” 475
Fig. 66: “Julia Cameron Norman” 476
Fig. 67: “Julia Margaret Cameron and Sons” 477
Fig. 68: “Julia Margaret Cameron” 478
Fig. 69: “Sir John Frederick William Herschel” 479
Fig. 70: “The Whisper of the Muse” 480
Fig. 71: “Lionel Tennyson as the Marquis de St. Cash” 481
Fig. 72: “A Rembrandt” 482
Fig. 73: “Mrs. Leslie Stephen” 483
Fig. 74: “Thomas Carlyle” 484
Fig. 75: “Anny Thackeray Ritchie” 485
Fig. 76: “Balaclava” by Roger Fenton 486
Fig. 77 “The Rosebud Garden of Girls” 487
Fig. 78: “Florence” 488
Fig. 79: “Sir Henry Taylor” 489
Fig. 80: “A Soldier”: Sir Robert Baden-Powell 490
Fig. 81: “So like a shatter’d column lay the King” 491
Fig. 82: Daniel Maclise, “Morte D’Arthur” 492
Fig. 83: “Little Prince Alamayou of Abyssinia” 493
Fig. 84: “Prospero and Miranda” 494
Fig. 85: “Friar Lawrence and Juliet” 495
Fig. 86: “Ophelia” 496
Fig. 87: “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid” – Burne Jones 497
Fig. 88: “Sisters” 498
Fig. 89: Mary Hillier as “St. Agnes” 499
Fig. 90: Mary Hillier as “The Dream” 500
Fig. 91: Mary Hillier as “Call, I follow” 501
Fig. 92: Dimbola Lodge 1871 502
Fig. 93: “Despair” 503
Fig. 94: Ellen Terry as “The South West Wind” 504
Fig. 95: Ellen Terry as “Sadness” 505
Abbreviations of Titles

_Idylls_: Tennyson’s _Idylls of the King_

_Illustrations_: Cameron’s _Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems_

_DNB_: _Dictionary of National Biography_

_Mem_: _Memoirs of Alfred Tennyson_ by Hallam Tennyson, 2 vol.

_OED_: _Oxford English Dictionary_

_Ricks_: _The Poems of Tennyson_, 2nd edition, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vol.

Works by Virginia Woolf

_AROO_: _A Room of One’s Own_

_BP_: _Books and Portraits_

_BTA_: _Between the Acts_

_D_: _Diary_, 5 vol.

_CE_: _Collected Essays_, 5 vol.

_CR_: _Common Reader_

_F_: _Freshwater_

_TG_: _Three Guineas_

_JR_: _Jacob’s Room_

_L_: _Letters_

_M_: _The Moment_

_MOB_: _Moments of Being_

_PA_: _A Passionate Apprentice_

_PH_: _Pointz Hall, the typescript drafts of Between the Acts_

_SF_: _Complete Shorter Fiction_

_VP_: _Victorian Photographs_
For

Prof. Donald Burton Melville

and

Prof. Martin Meisel

praesentia numina
Introduction

An enthusiast of Victorian literature will sooner or later come across the iconic photographs of British authors taken by Julia Margaret Cameron. The result of breaking nearly every photographic rule of lighting and scale, Cameron's out-of-focus glass-plate negatives issued in what are today considered “luscious, dark and magical” images. Though it is well known that her daughter’s gift of a camera to occupy her mother’s attention officially began Cameron's brief photographic career, few realize that a half-century later that very career would supply her grandniece Virginia Woolf with material for a play, a story, and an essay. Even less well noted are the underlying correspondences between Cameron’s book of Tennysonian Illustrations and Woolf's last novel, Between the Acts.

Cameron’s photographic work ranges from her early arresting head shots to the later, more intricate tableaux of biblical, literary, and allegorical scenes. This dissertation focuses on Cameron’s only published work, her two-volume Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems, in the context of Tennyson’s poetry and Woolf’s late writing. Cameron’s photographs re-envision Tennyson’s verse, retelling the poems in a way similar to that in which the pageant play in Between the Acts retells the history of English literature.²

---


² For ease of reference, in this paper I refer to Cameron’s Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems as “the Illustrations” and Tennyson’s Idylls of the King as “the Idylls.”
Though no one in the ample pool of critical writing about Tennyson, Cameron, and Woolf has taken on all three in a single study, four critics have noticed and commented on them two at a time. Linda Shires alone writes insightfully about the relationship of Tennyson’s work to Cameron’s, and Cameron’s to Woolf’s.³ Larisa Dryansky addresses the work of the photographer and the novelist from the point of view of an art historian, focusing on the presence of “flou” in both women’s work. She sees a similarity between Cameron’s softly-focused images and Woolf’s stream-of-consciousness writing.⁴ Masami Usui situates Cameron as Virginia Woolf’s “feminist precursor” (61),⁵ arguing that her photographs of women are ironic and reveal a “concealed revolt” (64) against patriarchy. Usui’s broad claims are difficult to prove, as there is little evidence of irony in Cameron’s photographs, nor can she be classified as a revolutionary feminist. Dryansky and Usui both note how Cameron and Woolf’s portraits of Julia Jackson Stephen – visual and verbal – link their work through the intergenerational position of Woolf’s mother. More recently, Emily Setina’s article on Cameron in Literature Compass explores Woolf’s lifetime interest in photography addressed in the context of her great aunt’s images.⁶ There are several critics who have written about Cameron, though none has attempted to hypothesize longitudinal ideological relationships between her work and that of Tennyson and Woolf. In this

---

³ “Patriarchy, Dead Men, and Tennyson’s Idylls of the King.” Victorian Poetry 30.3-4, Summer 1992. (401-417).


doors.doshisha.ac.jp/webopac/bdyview.do?bodyid=BD00011592.

dissertation I address the interrelated poetry, photography, and writing of these three figures, demonstrating the important underlying ways in which Cameron’s photographs, as unique versions of Tennyson’s poetry, are related to Woolf’s later writing, especially the texts which were published posthumously.

Critical response to Cameron’s life and work was slow to make its appearance. It was not until almost a half century after her death that Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry’s book about Cameron, *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* (1926), with its large, greyscale plates, first brought her work to the public’s attention. Alfred Stieglitz featured her images in his journal *Camera Works* in the 1920’s as early examples of pictorialism. In 1948 Helmut Gernsheim published the first monograph of Cameron’s life and work. The first scholarly article discussing her two-volume book of Tennysonian *Illustrations* appeared in 1973, with Charles Millard’s authoritative essay on the history of Cameron’s only published book.\(^7\) Several essays analyzing the achievement of the *Illustrations* have appeared since then; their number is growing each year. A long overdue but impressively magisterial *catalog raisonné* of Cameron’s photographs was published by Julian Cox in 2003. The same year, Victoria Olsen’s major biography of the photographer appeared, superseding Amanda Hopkinson’s earlier Virago paperback account of her life. Many other articles and books about Cameron have been published since then, several of which have informed this project. Full citations for these can be found in the bibliographic notations at the end of this dissertation.\(^8\)

---

7 “Julia Margaret Cameron and Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*”. *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. XXI, issue 2, April 1973 (187-201).

8 Of the important essays on Cameron that have been published recently, those most relevant to this study – in addition to the few discussed above – are the ones that appear in the *Works Cited* at the end of this paper under the surnames Alesiuk, Armstrong, Daniel, Gernsheim, Gurshtein, Haworth-Booth, Malcolm, Heyert, Hill, Homans, Hopkinson, Howard, Joseph, Kukitsch, Mackay, MachLachlan, Mancoff, Marsh, Mavor, McCormack, Melville, Mozley, Mulligan, Ovenden, Przblyski, Reid, Relihan, Roberts, Rosen, Thurman, Weaver, Watkins, Wolf, Wussow, Wynne-Davies, and Yamashiro.
The two chief men of this study – King Arthur and Alfred Tennyson – are introduced and discussed in this introduction, where their centrality to my argument is explored. This first section of the dissertation, after supplying important background information about the history and mythology surrounding these two figures, briefly contrasts the concept of chivalry popularized by the *Idylls* with the concepts of community theatre portrayed by Cameron’s *Illustrations*. Next it demonstrates the methodology I applied in analyzing the photographs of the *Illustrations* in a sample reading of the photograph Cameron entitled “Pre-Raphaelite Study” [sic], situated within the context of its literary and painterly antecedents. The last part of this introduction is devoted to a brief summary of the dissertation’s five chapters, which focus primarily on the work of Julia Margaret Cameron and Virginia Woolf.

**The Historical Background:**

**Legendary Arthur, Britain’s Epic Hero**

Though the story of Cameron’s *Illustrations* officially begins in 1848 with her arrival in London and the start of her friendship with Alfred Tennyson, its roots extend back a dozen centuries to the year 500 C.E. and the birth of a man whose legend indelibly shaped his country’s heritage. Arthur, taken to be the founder of Britain, is believed to have united its disparate tribes and been anointed its first king. Though all that is known about the historical Arthur is conjecture based on a few historical scraps, his story has grown to include iconic tales of his leadership, valor in battle, purity in honor, and devotion in love. Arthur became the hero of the nation’s most influential epic, a tale that conferred on its people a sense of identity and purpose. Though he is considered the embodiment of the quintessential Englishness, Arthur may not actually have existed. It is possible that he was a
completely fabricated figure or an outsider to Britain reconstructed as England’s national hero. Nennius’s History of the Britons contains the first written record of Arthur, very likely created by its author as an inspiration for the Welsh people of the ninth century, to encourage an increase of nationalism. The space of four hundred years between Arthur’s life and the appearance of its first written notation allowed ample room for creative imaginings to flourish, to be later received as hard fact.

A protean figure, the character of Arthur was continually re-written to echo the needs and ideals of the era. He changed shape with each century to accommodate its prevailing styles and values. In the twelfth century, the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere was added to the basic legends, as was the Grail quest. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, stories of additional heroes and lovers of Arthur’s court were added. His fame designated him as one of the world’s great leaders, on a par with Alexander and Charlemagne. He was eventually anointed one of the world’s Nine Worthies, primarily through Geoffrey of Monmouth’s narrative of his life. New material, such as the story of Tristram and Iseult, was carefully incorporated in ways that made it seem an original part of Camelot’s history.

The first of the two most influential versions of the Arthuriad in English was written by Sir Thomas Malory while in prison, under the title Le Morte d’Arthur, given by its publisher William Caxton. The book is believed to have been published in 1485 and considered by many – notably Virginia Woolf – to be the first book printed in English. Arthurian romances remained popular in England in the sixteenth century, but in the

---

9 According to Richard Barber, the historical Arthur may have been one of several diverse personae: “the last Roman general in Britain, the first of those Welsh guerilla fighters who defied the English until well into the Middle Ages, or a northern prince from Scotland who was later adopted by the Welsh living in Wales” (2).

10 This date has been called into question as being actually ten years later than the currently accepted date of Le Morte d’Arthur’s publication (1470); I have chosen nevertheless to use it as a reference point, consistent with Virginia Woolf’s acceptance of that date as a turning point in Anglophone culture, as described in Anon and The Reader.
seventeenth Arthur’s popularity reached its lowest point; he all but disappeared for a while under the watchful surveillance of the pious critics of the times. Their disapproval squelched Arthur’s growing popularity, which had begun to distract the public’s attention from the story of Christ and his church.

What is important here is to observe that when Arthur returned to the public eye in the Gothic revival of the nineteenth century, he did so in full force, through Tennyson’s exquisite production of the *Idylls of the King*. The poet worked on the epic poem throughout his career, publishing it in segments and revisions from 1856 to 1885. There are several other Victorian accounts of the legends, but Tennyson’s poetic version made Arthur a household presence in England.

**The Poetic Background:**

**Tennyson and Myth: “Timbuctoo”**

His epic Arthuriad was just one of the many myths Tennyson retold in his poetry. From early in his career as a poet he drew on stories of antiquity from sources across the globe – Greece, Egypt, India, and Norway, among others – to write a variety of poems with legendary or fabular roots.\(^1\) He invented the stories for some of them, adapted existing tales for others. His ability to create myths was useful in his personal life, providing a salvific resource and a healing balm for his grief at the loss of Arthur Hallam through the writing of *In Memoriam.*

---

\(^1\) Some examples of these poems are: “The Ganges,” “Babylon,” “The Hesperides,” “Tithonus,” “Antony to Cleopatra,” “The Expedition of Nadir Shah into Hindostan” “Scotch Song” and “The Kraken.”
From the outset of his career, Tennyson’s imagination was drawn to the past and to visual images. He remarked that “it is the distance that charms me in the landscape, the picture and the past, and not the immediate to-day in which I move” (Ricks, 2:232n). His friend from Cambridge, James Spedding, observed wryly that Tennyson was “a man always discontented with the Present till it has become the Past, and then he yearns toward it, and worships it, and not only worships it, but is discontented because it is past” (qtd. in Martin 203). Thus poetry functioned for Tennyson as a conservative force, protecting a heritage of stories and strengthening the nation’s spirit and identity through its narrative legacy. His “passion of the past” issued in poems that preserved British myths and offered the nation a way to conceptualize its character and purpose by illustrating chivalric values.

Wordsworth, who had served as Poet Laureate from 1843 till his death in 1850, had found his religion and poetic inspiration in nature, which Tennyson was not able to do. Lyell’s geological synthesis and Darwin’s revolutionary theories of origin were among the events of the nineteenth century that cast doubt on a literal interpretation of the biblical story of creation, eroding faith and intensifying Tennyson’s problematic relationship with established religion. Remnants of the old biblical stories are evident in his work, however. The Idylls can be read as a version of the loss of Eden.

Scientific investigation in the nineteenth century extended to the realm of vision. Photography and other visual technologies opened new worlds, revealing previously hidden territory to Victorians, from distant views to close-ups. In 1852 the first photographs of the moon were taken through a telescope, stimulating dreams of additional discoveries in the sky and beyond the horizon. Microscopic views excited similar imaginings. Through their photographs, travelers were able to bring home images of distant lands that most people

---

12 Carlyle famously and rather unkindly described Tennyson’s sometimes lugubrious attachment to the past, as that of a man “sitting on a dung heap surrounded by innumerable dead dogs” (Memoir I: 340). He later retracted that description.
Photography was the earliest technology to enable the control of time, allowing the individual to live asynchronously. It brought the past into the present while simultaneously demarcating the present from the past, as a photograph is immediately lost to the present moment at the instant in which it is created, yet always preserves a trace of that lost present moment in its image.

Photography was esteemed primarily as a conservative force in the nineteenth century, valued for its ability to preserve its subjects. Sir Frederick Pollock told the Photographic Society of London in 1855 that the camera would guarantee that “nothing that is extraordinary in art, that is celebrated in architecture, that is calculated to excite the admiration of those who behold it, need now perish; but may be rendered immortal by the assistance of Photography.”

The use of photography to preserve and verify the past thus visually added a dimension of “truth” to Cameron’s images of Tennyson’s poetry.

Given his natural predilection for mythopoesis, it is not surprising that Tennyson would turn to Arthurian legend and fable to replace the meaning that was being leached from the sources on which he had formerly been able to rely. While at Cambridge in 1828, he won the Chancellor’s Prize for his poem “Timbuctoo,” much of it based on “Armageddon,” his early adolescent poem on the subject of myth. “Timbuctoo” is significant to this dissertation because it is Tennyson’s first published meditation on the necessity of mythmaking for sustaining the life of the imagination. The poetic speaker of “Timbuctoo,” musing over ancient myths, achieves a “true” vision of heaven and earth as a gift from a heavenly creature who suddenly appears, releasing him from his “dull mortality” for a short

---

13 Kate Flint’s book on the visual imagination contains a thorough discussion of these and other extensions of vision in the Victorian age.


15 Elizabeth Adler Kroll locates the origin of English “national faith” as a heritage commodity in Tennyson’s poetic mythmaking. I owe much to her discussion of “Timbuctoo” (19 ff.) in this section, for it has provided me with a helpful foundation for my later hypotheses concerning the poet’s Arthuriad.
but intense and pivotal vision, setting the pattern for future mythological journeys of the imagination (Ricks 1: 194, ll. 94-96, 92-4). The poetic speaker's "mental eye grows large" enough to accommodate the realization that the celestial creature addressing him is "the Spirit,/ The permeating life which courseth through/ All the intricate and labyrinthine veins/ Of the great vine of Fable" (ll. 89-90, 215-18). He sees in this visionary instant that all life is animated by fable, myth and legend. It is a flash of vision in which pieces from the past are rearranged into a new order, revealing a previously unavailable insight.\(^\text{16}\)

Tennyson gives special prominence to the animating force of fable by observing that legends are an essential part of the meaning-making apparatus of all humans, as necessary for life "[a]s air is the life of flame" since "men's hopes and fears take refuge in" them (ll. 19-20, 223). These "legends quaint and old" (l. 16) exfoliate like Fable's vines in the human imagination, not just through externally verifiable hard fact, but as the hybrid product of "spirit fettered with the bond of clay," inspiring the imagination through old "dreams [...] of passing loveliness" to which "[m]en clung with yearning Hope, which would not die" (l. 27).\(^\text{17}\) Tennyson adapted and created such "truth-bearing" myths and legends in his poetry throughout his career. Myths offered him a way through which to conceptualize human history and experience, and an entry point opening to a spiritual world hidden behind physical reality.\(^\text{18}\) By writing the story of Arthur, Britain's legendary origin and first ruler, Tennyson sacralized his country, its people, literature, and landscape, giving to Britons a

\(^{16}\) "Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars" [Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama, Trauerspiel and Tragedy*].

\(^{17}\) Tennyson's hybrid mix of "spirit fettered with the bond of clay" resonates with Woolf's "twin searchlights" of fact and fiction to enable us to "see what never has been seen" (*Women and Fiction* 72). She characterizes these hybrid forces elsewhere as "granite and rainbow."

\(^{18}\) This moment of intuitive insight or vision into another reality is similar to Woolf's "moment of being" in which she was able to perceive a reality beyond the physical facts, or "cotton wool" of daily life (discussed in her memoir, *MOB*, under the rubric "Reminiscences" 72). Cf. Chapter Three of this project.
living history and insuring King Arthur’s continual return. Tennyson’s work celebrates the past’s potential as both a personal and national heritage.

This dissertation comprises five chapters. The first two introduce the major figures of the project – Cameron, Tennyson, and Woolf – and their relationship with each other. The interpretive concept of Cameron taking charge of Tennyson’s poetry (his Merlin-like spells) visually forms the basis for my reading of the Illustrations’ images. By showing women acting in a variety of leading roles, culminating in the singular portrayal of Princess Ida, the Illustrations photographs furnish a creative “contra-dictionary” to the prevailing Tennysonian narrative, a new version aligned with the concepts Woolf expresses in her anti-war polemic, Three Guineas. The photographs of the Illustrations suggest a conception of history different from Tennyson’s conservative myth-making. Through them Cameron appears as a playwright in the vein of Woolf’s Miss La Trobe, a version of the archetypal “Anon,” courageously making the most of her daily opportunities to create art, working against the inevitable failure of its illusion. Thus the chivalric ideology represented by Tennyson’s Idylls contrasts sharply with the more egalitarian aspects of the community theatricals that portray them, as photographed by Cameron and embodied in La Trobe’s pageant in Woolf’s last novel.

The Idylls and the Pageant:

Vertical, Horizontal, and Diagonal

The feudal, hierarchical organization of Arthur’s court is based on a power structure organized to flow from the divinized monarch down to its lowliest members. It assumes a
social contract in which privileged noblemen bear the obligation of caring for the less fortunate through allegiance to a chivalric code of honor. In contrast, the structure of Woolf's ideal society, a paradigm presented by the pageant in *Between the Acts*, is a community gathered in a loose horizontal or lateral organization, with its tendrils of communication and influence spreading out into a fluidly changing web. Theatrical performance is based on a different contract: an artistic agreement between performer and audience in which all participants are free to collaborate in the outcome of each performance.

Cameron’s book, illustrating chivalry through theatre, travels a course something like the “strange diagonal,” a phrase suggested by the narrator of Tennyson’s poem *The Princess* in his attempt to reconcile the male and female points of view (Ricks 2:294, l.27). The *Illustrations* contains pictures of Arthur’s hierarchical court portrayed through La Trobe’s participatory art. They illustrate Tennyson’s poetry in still photos reminiscent of community theatre. Thus Cameron’s photo text incorporates the twin utopian social paradigms of noble chivalry and egalitarian democracy by portraying Tennyson’s neo-feudalism through Woolf’s open-ended theatrical creativity, one conservative, the other liberal; each a defense against chaos, but both flawed and incompletely realizable ideals. The *Illustrations* embody the oldest of British stories through the newest of British technologies.
Cameron, Photography, 
and the Victorian Cultural Conversation

In 1848, the year the Camerons arrived in England, three young British painters -- Wm. Holman Hunt, D.G. Rossetti, and John Everett Millais – famously came together to pursue common artistic goals, calling themselves “the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.” In following John Ruskin's injunction to paint exactly what they saw, “rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing,” they became enamored of and inspired by the possibilities of photography, with its seeming ability to capture every nuance and detail. At first they painted from photos, adapting such photographic techniques as cropping and carefully staged lighting to their work. Victorian photographers began to borrow visual strategies and subject matter from the Pre-Raphaelites, especially their portrayal of scenes taken from literature, history, and religion, “to secure for photography,” as Julia Margaret Cameron wrote in a letter to Sir John Herschel, “the character and uses of High Art” – a radical and new kind of High Art, in the case of Pre-Raphaelitism.

Photography is in many ways “the most characteristic of Victorian media,” as, having been discovered at the beginning of Victoria’s reign, it “brought together science and art in a novel way, was realistic, inescapably contemporary, [and] incipiently democratic” (Gilmour 218). Its mechanical nature became an enduring source of contention among artists and critics, opening the practice to the charge of being robotic and unoriginal – thus not a true art.19 In its beginning years, photography could not capture the liveliness and subtleties of human expression on a model’s face, due to the long exposure times then required. Ruskin eventually came to repudiate his early enthusiasm and began to see photography as a passive servant, second rate to drawing and painting (Harvey 25).

19 q.v. Aaron Sharf’s discussion in Art and Photography.
Cameron knew two Pre-Raphaelite brothers personally: she and her sister Sara had entertained Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother William Michael at their Sunday afternoon salons in Little Holland House in the 1840’s. However, her friendship with D.G. Rossetti became strained after she took up photography. She annoyed him with her continual pestering to sit for her – and worse, for soliciting positive reviews of her work from him, to neither of which would he agree. William Michael acceded compliantly to her requests, however, and they exchanged art tips, as well as costumes and props for their pictures.20

Cameron illustrated some of the same literary subjects as the Pre-Raphaelites – Tennyson’s “Mariana,” “The Beggar Maid,” and “The Gardener’s Daughter” are some examples, as are her scenes from the *Idylls*. Cameron’s most compelling and intriguing image related to the Pre-Raphaelites’ work is the suggestive photo she called “Pre-Raphaelite Study” [sic] (fig. 64), an apparent version of Wm. Holman Hunt’s painting, “Isabella and the Pot of Basil” (fig. 63). A discussion of the painting, the photograph, and the tale’s literary ancestry follows herein, included as an example of the methodology I used to discuss the *Illustrations* in this project.

**A Sample Analysis:**

**Reading “Isabella”**

Giovanni Boccaccio originally gave his fourteenth-century poem the *Decameron* an Arthurian title: *Prencipe Galeotto*. In legend, the Prencipe was Lancelot’s friend and Arthur’s enemy, a man who fostered the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere out of spite for Arthur. The unsanctioned love of Lancelot and Guinevere is mirrored by the story

---

20 Cameron’s correspondence with W.M. Rossetti (in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center) indicates their affectionate relationship.
of the love affair between Lisabetta and Lorenzo, featured on day five of the Decameron.

Their story tells how Lisabetta’s brothers kill her lover Lorenzo, a young man who works for them, because he is poor and an unsuitable candidate for her hand, though she had fallen deeply in love with him. Lorenzo appears to Lisabetta in a dream, telling her where they have hidden his body. She retrieves his head, hides it in a pot of basil, and waters it with her tears. Her brothers discover what she has done and take the pot of basil away from her. Broken hearted without it, Lisabetta dies of grief.

Keats adapted the tale poetically in 1818, changing the protagonist’s name to Isabella – more melodious and appropriate for his romantic verse. His poem made the tale famous in England, importing and rewriting Boccaccio’s Italian version into a canonical work. Thirty years later, Millais painted “Isabella and Lorenzo,” a scene showing the couple’s love-locked gaze across a dinner table while one of her brothers kicks her dog under that table, revealing his vicious nature. Twenty years after that, Holman Hunt illustrated the fifty-fourth strophe of Keats’s poem in a painting for which his wife Fanny was the model (fig. 63). In this image Fanny poses as Isabella embracing a majolica pot of lush basil, apparently watering it with her tears, in illustration of Keats’ poem:

54

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
Of Basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.

21 The image can be viewed at http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/online/pre-raphaelites/lorenzo/

22 Keats’s “Isabella and the Pot of Basil” is available in full at: http://www.bartleby.com/126/38.html
By choosing to illustrate Isabella’s story, which features the mistreatment of a representative of the lower classes, Millais expressed the Pre-Raphaelites’ belief in social equality. The cruel results of the brothers’ prejudice against Lorenzo because of his status are portrayed in Hunt’s painting; in Millais’ image Isabella’s grief and devotion are made clear by her posture and expression.

The evolution of the title is significant: after Keats changed Boccaccio’s Lisabetta to Isabella; Hunt changed the Keatsian “Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil” to “Isabella and the Pot of Basil” for the title of his painting. By doing so, he disentangled the bereaved woman from her linguistic equivalence with the head in the majolica pot of herbs and made her a co-star of the story. In Hunt’s title the lovers share equal billing, not indivisible synonymy, as they do in Keats’s.

The photograph that Cameron made in 1870 and called “A Pre-Raphaelite Study” (fig. 64) is a near duplicate of Holman Hunt’s painting, with one significant difference: Cameron’s Isabella has no pot of basil. She stars alone in this scene. By removing Lorenzo’s head, Cameron stripped away the head of Isabella’s lover and co-star, the cause of her demise. Isabella is left to define herself without relation to anyone other than the viewer. In this photograph, she does not shed tears. Her hand is placed rebelliously on her hip and her long hair lies draped on the pillow above her head; neither hand nor hair is wrapped around Lorenzo’s remains, as in Hunt’s painting. Cameron’s version of Isabella returns our gaze directly, asserting her self-possession and independence. There are no distracting, minute details cluttering the photograph; it is all about Isabella. In Cameron’s photo one sees an autonomous woman whose gaze connects with the viewer, drawing us into the scene. This effect is the opposite of the Pre-Raphaelites’ art, with its faithful reproduction of even the most minute detail. In the background of his painting Hunt included the
antechamber with its bed, the patterned rug, hanging light fixture, and watering can – all characteristic of the details Cameron left out.

The actor who plays Isabella in this photo is May Prinsep, Cameron’s sister Sara’s adopted daughter. A favorite model for her aunt Julia, May appears in five photographs in the *Illustrations*, more than any other actor or model in either of the two volumes. She plays the parts of Lynette (fig. 6) and Elaine (figs. 16, 18, 50 & 52) – two very different roles.

Soft folds of fabric fill the photograph’s frame completely in “A Pre-Raphaelite Study”: the woman’s hand and head are all we see of her body, which is immersed in yards of flowing fabric. The gauzy white of May’s gown contrasts gently with the dark background. Though the overall image appears to be one of Cameron’s soft-focus photographs, May’s face, hand, and bodice are in clear focus in this portrait: we can see the pupil of one eye clearly, as well as the crisp folds of gauze in the front of her dress. The jewelry she wears – a necklace, multiple bangle bracelets, and her rings -- are subtle accents, but the rope of beads that hangs from May’s waist stands out as a salient detail, a secular rosary of seeds.

Cameron rubbed the edge of the negative and swirled chemicals around the glass plate so that the background of the photograph fades softly at the top left corner and a mist hovers over the darkness of the pedestal on which May reclines.

Isabella’s literary lineage stretches back to the fourteenth century and forward into the twentieth, if the Isabella of *Between the Acts* is considered to be part of it. Woolf’s “Isa” is also a young woman in love and unfree. She weeps internally, pondering her own death. In a pathetic fallacy, Isa associates the raindrops that splash and run down her cheeks with “tears, tears, tears” (BTA 180), as if they were mourning in her stead, for her – and all of humanity’s – plight. The other, earlier Isabellas – Boccaccio’s, Keats’s, and Hunt’s – are trapped in cruelly unjust situations, victimized, and die of heartbreak. Hunt’s painting shows a grieving Isabella confined in a narrow space shortly before her death. Hunt’s wife
Fanny, who posed for the painting, died shortly after giving birth a few months after the sitting. Cameron’s softly limned Isabella is more closely related in affect to Woolf’s Isa than to earlier iterations of Isabella.

Examining “A Pre-Raphaelite Study” in this way, and situating it within its intellectual and artistic context, demonstrates how Cameron’s literary illustrations add new readings to the cultural conversation in which they are participants. After a close look at “A Pre-Raphaelite Study,” the viewer consciously or unconsciously carries it away as an afterimage which affects the amalgamated memory of all other versions of Isabella’s story, verbal or visual. None of them, including Hunt’s painting, constitutes the ultimate step in the tale’s evolution; each version changes the way we see the story.

Using a similar process to the one above, in this dissertation I explore the Illustrations photographs within the context of the their literary, historical, and cultural background, showing how Cameron’s images portray Tennyson’s verse in ways that suggest alternative versions of the poems to the ones usually accepted as normative. I argue that the impressions we carry away from her literary illustrations alter our total composite memory of their subject matter, affecting the way we regard and remember the poems.

In preparation for writing about Cameron, Woolf spent a great deal of time studying her great aunt’s letters and photographs. Quite possibly, looking through the amateur theatricals that Cameron captured photographically in the Illustrations influenced Woolf to create the pageant of the history of English literature in Between the Acts, as well to base the character of its playwright-director, Miss La Trobe, on Cameron. The construction of her aggregate figure, the troubadour Anon, corresponds to both La Trobe and the photographer. Woolf came to a special appreciation of the Elizabethan theatre late in her career,

---

23 In 1874 George Eliot gave another twist to the legend of Isabella in the Finale of Middlemarch, where Lydgate reportedly calls his wife Rosamund his basil plant, elaborating that “basil was a plant that flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains.”
influenced by her admiration for Shakespeare (Schwarz 721). Community theatre with its
diverse, local audience, held a special attraction for her. Its fluid, democratic organization,
noncoercive collaboration, and the potential stimulation of its participants’ dreams, enabled
each participant a temporary escape from the prison of his or her selfhood and entrance to
a larger world through the imagination. In short, community theatre could offer an
experience of transformative power.24

Summary of Chapters

_The Theatre of Anon_ begins with the meeting of three important Victorian figures:
Julia Margaret Cameron, Alfred Tennyson, and Henry Taylor, who became friends and
neighbors in London and on the Isle of Wight. After a brief look at the status of amateur
photography in nineteenth-century England, the dissertation moves on to a close reading of
Cameron’s autobiographical fragment, _Annals of My Glass House_, an account of her
photographic career, and the people who influenced it. Dimbola, the Camerons’ home on the
Isle of Wight, stands next door to the Tennysons’ Farringford in Freshwater Bay. Tennyson
played a major part in establishing Cameron’s career; her sanguine nature helped buoy his
melancholic one; their relationship was the cause of as much mutual vexation as delight.

Before taking up photography, Cameron had enthusiastically staged and directed
numerous amateur theatricals. She commissioned a thatched-roof cottage theatre to be
built next to her home, specifically dedicated to these performances, in which Tennyson’s
sons often playacted with her own five boys and the other young people of West Wight. Her
involvement in producing these plays was likely a part of the motivation to create her

24 Brenda Silver’s essay, “Virginia Woolf and Community” addresses this connection.
Illustrations, the two-volume book of photographic tableaux – each of its plates is a dramatic scene staged and directed by the photographer. For her book, Cameron lithographed key lines of verse from the Laureate's poetry that portray visual moments, and paired them with photographed scenes acted by friends, family members, and local villagers. The first chapter of the dissertation ends with a history of the Illustrations, including a description of two volumes’ physical composition and specificities.

Chapter Two introduces Woolf’s writing about Cameron and Tennyson. The accounts Woolf and her mother wrote about the lives of the photographer and poet are examined, including a novel, a drawing room comedy, an encyclopedia entry, and an entertaining hyperbolic essay. Our three major figures each wrote an autobiography in a different genre. Tennyson’s is a poetic narrative of following “the gleam” of inspiration, recounted in his assumed persona of Merlin (Part B of Appendix A). In her intimate memoir of her early years, Woolf describes the Sunday salons that Cameron and her sister Sara held. Cameron’s Annals is the unfinished account of her photographic career (Part A of Appendix A).

The buffoonish portraits of Cameron and Tennyson as high-minded Victorian sentimentalists in Woolf’s drawing-room comedy Freshwater showcase their exaggerated foibles for the purpose of an evening’s lively entertainment. Freshwater gave Woolf the opportunity to practice ventriloquizing extreme versions of their voices. The second chapter of this project also addresses the deeper and more complex ways in which Tennyson is Woolf’s Victorian “other.”

Chapter Two ends with an extended analysis of the numerous serial drafts of “The Searchlight,” paying special attention to “the Freshwater drafts,” an abandoned narrative tributary starring Cameron. A close reading of these drafts reveals a bridge between Cameron’s photography and Woolf’s creation of the playwright Anon and the central
importance of her community theatre. It also suggests that Cameron’s portrait of King Arthur served as a metonym for British civilization for Woolf and that it expressed the transformative power of Cameron’s vision.

Chapter Three is the theoretical core of the dissertation, linking the Illustrations to Woolf’s late writing through the ideologies represented by the dual cultural heroes Arthur and Anon through the medium of photography. The chapter begins by exfoliating the contextual, historical, and aesthetic outworkings of the legacies of Arthurian chivalry. Because Woolf believed that the patriarchal organization of society was the cause of war, she published photos of men of distinction dressed in their apposite costumes in Three Guineas, as visual representations of the roots of violence. The first of these generic “war criminals” she proposed was the portrait of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, entitled “A General.” I explore Baden-Powell’s military career and how he came to found the Boy Scouts on principles of Arthurian chivalry.

The virtues of knighthood expressed in the Idylls were taken by the British public as a noble code of conduct, a goal for all Victorians. Iconic Arthur, the human embodiment of a reassuring set of ideals, was invoked during times of stress and chaos. By the twentieth century, the code of chivalry had become deeply embedded in English heritage. Woolf objected to its patriarchal practice of denying women equality, which grew from its insistence on constraining polarized gender and class roles.

As an alternative hero to Arthur, Woolf envisioned Anon, an aggregate of all the creative people of the past, present and future whose names had not been recorded in history. Thus Anon, whose birth preceded Arthur’s, was “often a woman” (AROO 49). Woolf believed that the theatre of Anon, conceived of as an all-embracing, democratic paradigm, held hope for the future of all peoples. The magic of Anon’s performance was capable of
transforming fragmented quotidian human life into an artistic achievement, however temporarily.

Walter Benjamin theorized the existence of an optical unconscious capable of being altered by redemptive optics. These concepts, when combined with his idea of a reconstellation of historical fragments into a new order, help explain the power possessed by Tennyson’s Arthurian legends as Woolf initially heard them through her father’s recitation and saw them through Cameron’s photographs. Chapter Three explores some of the mechanisms that work below the surface of human consciousness to affect vision, as hypothesized by Walter Benjamin. Cameron’s photographs are discussed as a reconstellation of Tennyson’s traditional narratives, offering a new understanding of British history.

Like Tennyson’s subversive Princess Ida, Woolf believed that women should be granted an education, given a voice, and allowed to enter the professions. The “shadow of the private house” (*Three Guineas* 22, 93) a sequella of chivalry, had darkened women’s lives historically, integrated in the public’s optical unconscious as normative.

Arthur, the epitome of chivalry, emblematized the root cause of war to Woolf. She writes about Arthur only twice in all the work she published, both times with reference to Cameron’s photographs: in *Victorian Photographs* and the Freshwater drafts of “The Searchlight.” Arthur is otherwise absent in her oeuvre – except for three posthumously published, recuperated pieces that bookend her career.25 I believe Cameron’s kitschy photographs contributed to Woolf’s growing ability to see Tennyson’s Arthur as one player among many in the pageant of literary history, rather than in his normally accepted central role as the apotheosis of chivalry and representative of British character.

25 Arthur’s distant court is briefly mentioned in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” written in 1906, when she was twenty-four. He appears more extensively in the manuscript *Anon*, written in 1941. Arthur makes a one-sentence cameo appearance in her last novel, *Between the Acts*, as La Trobe sizes up an actor for his role (BTA 154).
The Photographs and the Novel

Chapters Four and Five of the dissertation contain close readings of the *Illustrations* photographs situated in the context of Virginia Woolf’s writing, Tennyson’s poetry, and their cultural resonances. Chapter Six is composed entirely of the poetry and images that make up the *Illustrations*’ two volumes. In discussing them, I address the photos thematically through the study of a half-dozen interwoven threads, from the frame tale of Merlin and Vivien and the opening scene of Gareth and Lynette, to the death of Arthur and Elaine and the heartbreak of *Maud*. I see the *Illustrations* as Cameron’s photographic “capture” of Tennyson’s poems. Vivien, like Cameron, a possible avatar of Anon, presides metaphorically over the performance of the poetic scenes that fill the two volumes, having “captured” Merlin’s Spell of Making.

Woolf’s novel opens on an idyllic midsummer night, parallel to the opening image of the *Illustrations*, in which Lynette first falls in love with Gareth: a “[...] hush’d night, as if the world were one/ Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness”(figs. 5 & 6). The novel’s romantic opening is quickly deflated by the modernist intrusion of unromantic quotidian realities which are studied in the context of the mythological, psychological, and aesthetic aspects that are the underpinnings of *Between the Acts*, most of which are also found in the *Illustrations*.

The ghostly nightingale, invoked on the first page of the novel, continues to haunt the book. It appears also in the *Illustrations*, through the sisterly relationships among women, exemplified by the myth of the nightingale and the swallow. Woolf and Cameron
ring changes on this ancient myth. Through her placement of the photos, Cameron seems to pair Enid with Elaine, and the May Queen with Ida in sororal relationships. The sister-myth underscores the importance of that relationship to Cameron, as crucial to her as it was to Woolf, and indicates the extent of the unabashed freedom with which Cameron came to amend and augment Tennyson’s poetry.

“The Theatre of Anon” focuses on one “sister” in particular, Princess Ida, presented by Cameron in her most powerful and triumphant moment (fig. 40), as the founder of a university for women. At the outset of Tennyson’s poem she is the fulfillment of the ideals Woolf proposes in Three Guineas and Anon, though she becomes silenced as the poem progresses. Ida expresses the dream that Tennyson and Woolf held in common: that the education of woman would enable her to “plant a solid foot into the Time. And mould a generation strong to move” – allowing her voice to be heard through writing. Ida wishes she were “some mighty poetess” – like Woolf – who could write history as she understood it, leaving her work as a legacy “for afterhands, though she herself effect but little” and through her legacy “lift the woman’s fallen divinity/ Upon an even pedestal with man.”

Many birds fly through Woolf’s novel beside the nightingale and the swallow, most notably the starlings whose pelting brings creativity to La Trobe and the yaffle, the jewel-like, laughing green woodpecker, an avian Anon. Ultimately, however, the play comes to an end. The Illustrations and Between the Acts close as valedictions, legacies left at the end of their authors’ careers, functioning as both celebrations of and memorials for the English life they had known, to which they bade farewell in their books.

---

26 These quotations from The Princess are found in Ricks 2: 227, l.246; 263, l.405; & 226, l.207-8.
Endings

The dissertation closes with a meditation on the ebb and flow of dreams and the underlying sense of disillusionment detectable in Cameron and Woolf's last work. The final four photographs of the Illustrations picture loss in the form of the deaths of Arthur and Elaine and Maud's “splendid tear.” Between the Acts closes with La Trobe sitting in a pub, her imagination at work beginning to plan the play for the following summer. She envisions two figures beginning a new scene (BTA 212), anticipating the novel's last line: “The curtain rose. They spoke” (BTA 219). Her amateur theatrical blends with the couple's life at Pointz Hall, and becomes part both of the ancient story of Genesis as well as the actual couple’s unhappy union.

A close look at the end of Cameron's career, seen through her writing and the reviews of her photography, reveals the feelings of disappointment and sense of betrayal she hid from her public and also possibly from herself. Her photographs, which she believed were national treasures, had been harshly critiqued by the press. The nature of the photographic image itself, when used in illustrating a poetic text as in the Illustrations, causes the viewer's alienation because of its particularities, which are too specific and distractingly realistic to convey the idealization of a literary scene. The Victorian audience's expectation of a poem's artistic and dramatic realization were ineluctably defeated by the medium of photography, even with Cameron's artistic skill. She felt she had failed economically, the family thus having been forced to leave England. She, like Woolf, who fled London during the war, was exiled to a place where she had no encouraging “echo” to support her.
Though Woolf’s novel demonstrates the thrilling possibilities of theatrical illusion that can be created with the “scraps, orts, and fragments” 27 (BTA 188) of daily life, the pageant in *Between the Acts* reminds us that ultimately art is illusion, by using Troilus’ words in his self-delusion denying Cressida’s treachery. The novel ends with the awareness that the artistic illusions so necessary for enriching our lives are, after all, just illusions, but that ultimately “there is joy, sweet joy in company” (BTA 133) – especially in a theatrical production.

In the *Afterwork*, I suggest two compelling areas for further study: the continuation of Cameron’s tradition of photographing women in diverse iconic roles by Mme. Yevonde and Cindy Sherman, and the recent materialization, through new media and telecommunications, of Woolf’s concept of a participatory community extending beyond national borders and enabling the writing of a common history with voices that had formerly been silent.

---

27 *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 5, sc. 2, ll. 184-5
Chapter One

Julia Margaret Cameron and Alfred Tennyson

Cameron, Her Life and Career

Taylor and Tennyson

1848 was a pivotal year for Julia Margaret and Charles Hay Cameron; it was the year they left India to settle in England, where they would live for the next quarter century.\(^\text{28}\)

Shortly after having arrived in London, Julia Margaret Cameron met the two men who would become her closest male friends, deeply influencing the course of her personal and professional life: Alfred Tennyson and Henry Taylor. Though this project focuses primarily on Cameron's friendship with Tennyson, it traces the ways in which Henry Taylor functioned as a defining presence and reliable reporter of their lives. In his autobiography Taylor recorded the minute details of daily life – a chronicle that proved useful to Virginia Woolf decades later.

When Cameron first encountered Taylor accidentally in 1848 in Tunbridge Wells, she was struck by his "singularly impressive appearance" which she later immortalized in

\(^{28}\) Charles Hay Cameron, a Benthamite jurist, had retired, after serving on several commissions in India, and acting as chief adviser to Macaulay in preparing the penal code, "He took a great interest in the introduction of English education among the natives of India" (DNB, eds. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee (London, Oxford UP: 1900) Vol8: 289: entry written by Leslie Stephen).

Gauri Visnawathan discusses C.H. Cameron's educational beliefs in depth and in broad context (Masks of Conquest, 94-117).
numerous photographic portraits. Cameron scholar Helmut Gernsheim describes the effect of Taylor’s striking appearance:

> Out for a walk one day, Mrs. Cameron encountered a tall, distinguished-looking middle-aged man in a long cape and a “wide-awake” hat. “My dear, you can never be sure of yourself,” she confided twenty or so years later to Anne Thackeray. “I felt as if a dagger had been plunged into my bosom.”

(1975, 18)

A century later, Taylor would play an important role in “The Searchlight,” a story by Virginia Woolf in which he sits for Cameron in the role of King Arthur. Cameron met the newly wed Emily and Alfred Tennyson in October of 1850, through Taylor’s hospitality. Her husband away in Ceylon, Cameron was visiting the Taylors at their home in Mortlake. She quickly became an intimate friend of the Tennysons.

Wordsworth had just died and a new Laureate had not yet been appointed; Taylor and Tennyson were both under consideration for the honor. Cameron was convinced that Henry Taylor’s poetry was superior to Tennyson’s (Martin 409). She tried relentlessly to persuade Tennyson of Taylor’s greater talent, which did little to foster a feeling of mutual appreciation between the two men.

Less than a month after their first meeting, Tennyson was chosen Poet Laureate and Taylor remained in his job as a civil servant in the Colonial Office. Cameron tried continually, though unsuccessfully, to negotiate a closer relationship between the two poets.

---

29 Leslie Stephen describing Taylor (Ibid: vol. 50: 412)

30 Ellen Terry is the other of the two significant literary-artistic presences in Freshwater in the 1860’s who interacted with Cameron and inspired Woolf. Taylor and Terry sat to Cameron several times (See Appendix B, figs. 94 & 95). They are both characters in the Freshwater drafts of “The Searchlight.”
Even after she left England she wrote to Henry Taylor from Ceylon trying to persuade him to compose a poetic portrait of the Laureate: “I wish you would paint a Vandyck [sic] of Alfred Tennyson. It has been complained of that the contemporaries of Shakespeare & Milton did them no justice. Let not the same be said of Alfred Tennyson & Henry Taylor” (1 July, 1876, Bodleian Library Ms. Eng. Lett. D 13 fol. 84).

Cameron called Tennyson her “contemplative” and Taylor her “practical” poet. Tennyson coveted privacy and seclusion, and did not appreciate Cameron’s insistent petitions to sit for her photographs. He was given to small complaints – reactions to such things as the pedestrian intrusions of strangers, the daily irritations caused by workmen, and the frustrations of his nearsightedness – which, combined with his shyness and reclusive tendencies, caused Cameron to write to her husband in exasperated complaint that “the looking at him would be the most capital offense of all if he were Ruler of the Universe and yet he is so worth looking at – so grand in form + character + even in his shrinking there is a sad + serious helplessness -- + no offensiveness – None is meant” (unpublished letter of May 25, 1860, Heinz archive, NPG, London). Leslie Stephen was later to verify the Laureate’s sensitivity, quoting Tennyson’s observation that “‘A flea will annoy me [...] a fleabite will spread a square inch over the surface of my skin...I am thin-skinned and I take no pains to hide it’” (Studies of a Biographer 2: 218), a statement Woolf later parodied in Freshwater by having Tennyson say “If I weren’t the most stoical man in the world, the very skin on my wrists would rise and blossom in purple and red at the innumerable bites of the poisoned bugs and pismires of the Press” (Freshwater 71).

Corroborating the poet’s self-appraisal, Ruskin remarked that “Tennyson’s face is more agitated by the intenseness of sensibility than is almost bearable by the looker on – he seems almost in a state of nervous trembling like a jarred string of a harp” (qtd. in Auerbach

31 Unpublished letter from Cameron to G.F. Watts, December 3, 1860, held in the Heinz archive of the NPG.
Taylor dramatically, if inelegantly, described Tennyson’s reclusive instincts, ignoring Cameron’s injunction to him not to “bring [Tennyson’s] sulkiness more forward than his greatness” (fol.82 d.13 MS Lett. Bodleian). According to Taylor, Tennyson:

> said he believed every crime and every vice in the world were connected with the passion for autographs and anecdotes and records, -- that the desiring anecdotes and acquaintances with the lives of great men was treating them like pigs to be ripped open for the public; that he knew he himself should be ripped open like a pig. [...]

> Then he said that the post for two days had brought him no letters, and that he thought there was a sort of syncope in the world as to him and to his fame [...].“ (Autobiography II: 193)

Though he dreaded interactions with his public, Tennyson valued and relied on a positive “echo” from the public about his work. Taylor, voluble in his writings as in his friendships, did not feel the need to protect himself from critics that Tennyson did. His easygoing nature made him a compliant sitter for Cameron’s photos, and his comfort in self-revelation proved useful to Woolf years later. He offered a running commentary on the minute details of his daily life in his two-volume Autobiography. In contrast, Tennyson chronicled his life in the form of a short poem, “Merlin and the Gleam,” in which he described his career metaphorically, narrating it as if to a young poet.³²

Taylor was photographed by Cameron almost every day when he visited Freshwater, as he often did from his home across the Solent in Bournemouth (Autobiography II: 197). Though she was not shy in making her preference for Taylor known to Tennyson, the two poets’ rivalry was not entirely the result of Cameron’s pitting

---

³² The poem appears in Appendix A.
them against each other; they had been sparring long before she arrived in England. Cameron observed that in conversation “they were like two brilliant fencers crossing their rapiers or flashing their foils, both giving and evading clean thrusts” (qtd. in Fuller 36).

The three friends would, in an earlier century, have been said to be ruled by different “humours”: Cameron possessed an expansive, sanguine temperament, more closely aligned with Taylor’s easy, though somewhat phlegmatic, good nature than with the Laureate’s often melancholy one, as heir to the Tennyson family’s “black blood.” Cameron was not one to sit passively at home, but always seemed to be embarking on a new adventure: “O what good it does to one’s soul to go forth!” she wrote in 1875, “How it heals all the little frets and insect-stings of life, to feel the pulse of the large world and to count all men as one’s brethren and to merge one’s individual self in the thoughts of the mighty whole” (qtd. in Ovenden 5).

By the late 1850’s Cameron, along with her younger sons and her sister Sara, stayed at Farringford, the Tennysons’ home on the Isle of Wight, for most of the summer while her husband visited their coffee plantation in Ceylon. They lingered after the season to rent a cottage near Farringford for the winter and spring of 1859 (Olsen 116), during which time Cameron, delighted with the charms of Freshwater Bay, began looking for a possible real estate purchase there, near the Tennysons’ home. That winter she made arrangements with Jacob Long, “an old sailor,” to buy the two houses next door to the Tennysons’ estate, naming her new home “Dimbola” after the family’s coffee plantation in Ceylon – though she had to wait for her husband’s return to make the actual purchase (Fuller 31). She had the two structures connected by a crenellated tower, thus establishing her own island bailiwick, a Gothic version of her husband’s bungalow in the Dimbola district in the lush interior valley of Vella Oya, Ceylon.
Cameron's Career Begins

Used to the chaos of a large household, Cameron suffered intense loneliness in her new home in West Wight when her husband and sons went off to Ceylon in 1863 to tend the family's failing coffee plantation. She described the separation as painful: "the more it is prolonged, the more the wound seems to widen" (qtd. in Gernsheim 27). She confessed to a friend, "I assume vivacity of manner for my own sake as well as for others" (Ibid 27). When she was visiting her daughter at Christmas in 1863, she received a large wooden box camera accompanied by the wish that, "It may amuse you, Mother, to try to photograph during your solitude at Freshwater" (Annals 2).

The gift was bestowed just before the expected arrival of Julia Cameron Norman’s first child, providing a diversion that protected young Julia and her household from her mother’s excessive attention. Imperious, impulsive, possessed of volcanic energy and extravagant generosity, Cameron seemed likely to take over Julia’s domestic life. In a strategy akin to giving an older sibling a doll to distract her from the arrival of a new baby, the photographer’s daughter gave her mother a new occupation. The result, by 1874, the year her daughter passed away, was a ten-year-old grandchild and a body of photographs of the same age.

On January 29, 1864, after several failed attempts to capture the likenesses of two children and a farmer who “resembled Bollingbroke”[sic] (Annals 3), Cameron took a

---

According to the scholar Joanne Lukitsch (1987), however, this first camera was given by Charles, not Julia Norman (39). We can speculate that the gift was motivated by a complex combination of intentions. In the family’s correspondence there is the suggestion that it was Charles Norman who gave Cameron the camera as a way of keeping her out of his and his wife’s affairs.
picture of eight-year-old Annie Philpot, a frequent visitor to the island with her family, which she called "Annie, my first success" (fig. 65). In her autobiography, Cameron designates the completion of this photograph as the originating moment of her career, although she had actually been interested in photography for a long time prior to the gift from her daughter. Sir John Herschel had sent her photographic chemicals while she lived in Calcutta. After having taken photos for a couple of years prior to 1864 using a camera already in her possession, she put together her first album of photographs for her invalided younger sister Mia (Maria) Jackson (Virginia Woolf's grandmother), which she dated July 7, 1863, six months before "Annie, my First Success" was taken.  

Using artistic license, Cameron shaped the narrative of her professional career with her daughter and Annie as reference points.

Living next door to Tennyson boosted Cameron's professional life, as it gave her the opportunity to photograph the many famous visitors he attracted. The door she commissioned to open the brick wall that separated Dimbola from Farringford, facilitated her quick and easy access to his home. She frequently arrived unannounced at the Tennysons' — bearing gifts or unsolicited advice. A well-known anecdote has it that, during Garibaldi's visit to Farringford, Cameron, swathed in Indian shawls and dumb with admiration and respect, came before him in order to ask him to sit for her, throwing herself

---

34 See A Victorian Album, ed. Graham Ovenden, and For my best beloved Sister Mia: an Album of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron, two facsimile editions of this album. This album is the most domestic of all of Cameron’s albums; it comes closest to being a family album. The Mia Album was a double-faced book with two distinct sections. It has recently been taken apart and its photographs mounted separately for display purposes. With the exception of two works by O.G. Rejlander, the first section consisted entirely of Cameron’s photographs dating from 1864 to 1869. The second section, which begins at the back of the book and proceeds forward on the opposite leaves of the pages, consisted of photographs by other artists.

There is divided opinion about the beginning date of Cameron's career. Scholar Eugenia Parry Janis believes that Cameron started taking photos with a box camera fully a year before she gave her sister the album in July 1863. ("Let Us Crown Ourselves With Rosebuds" 9). Colin Ford, in The Cameron Collection, argues that she began taking pictures in 1864, and in order to make that date jibe with the fact of the 1863 completion of the Mia Album, surmises that the album must have been at the time of its presentation composed of photographs made by other photographers.
on her knees and extending a hand stained black with photographic chemicals. Assuming she was a beggar, he waved her away.

Cameron’s Annals of My Glass House

Cameron began to write her autobiography in 1874, stopping abruptly after scarcely more than a dozen pages. She called it Annals of my Glass House. It exists today as a handwritten manuscript in the archives of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain. Though never readied for publication by its author, it appeared posthumously in print in 1889 in an exhibition catalog of “Mrs. Cameron’s Photographs” published by the Camera Gallery in London, and then later in two periodicals – the Beacon 2 (July 1890, 157-160) and the Photographic Journal 67 (July 1927, 296-301). It has since been reprinted in several books about Cameron and anthologies of essays on the history of photography. The thirty-seven year gap between the essay’s origin and republication is indicative of the oscillation in Cameron’s popularity.

One can see how Cameron, looking backward over her career from its final year, shaped the story of the Annals, taking liberties with facts and quotes and designing it with an elastic sense of time. Ultimately, she loses control of her material: though the Annals begins as an elegy for Julia, it ends with a protest against Tennyson.

Two other accounts of Cameron’s life provide useful comparisons to the Annals, each written by a close family member: one is her niece Julia Jackson Stephen’s entry in the Dictionary of National Biography, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and her grandniece Virginia Woolf’s introductory essay in Victorian Photographs. Each of these
accounts approaches Cameron’s life from a different perspective and offers a unique portrait of the photographer.

In the Annals Cameron tells us that during the first years of her career she was full of desire and “longed to arrest all beauty that came before” her, but observed that “at length the longing has been satisfied” (Annals 2). After a robust ten years’ production, Cameron’s photographic output had dwindled sharply at the time of her daughter’s death. Some of the excitement of her work seems to have died with her only daughter Julia Norman, who bore her mother’s Christian name. At this time her fortunes also changed: the Camerons’ coffee plantation finally succumbed in 1873 to a blight that turned Ceylon into a tea-growing island, causing the family to become dependent upon gifts from her sisters, patrons, and friends. Cameron’s health suddenly deteriorated; her doctor informed her that one of her lungs was “badly affected by disease” (Martin 508). These events made the irrevocable foreclosure of time painfully apparent. Cameron had taken few photographs of her daughter; Julia Norman (fig. 66) was not often chosen as a sitter because of her “commonplace” appearance (Taylor 46). She bore a resemblance to her mother in looks, but not personality.

Her only daughter, Julia was also the only one of her six children whom Cameron lost during her lifetime. Julia Norman’s death in childbirth was a sudden and unexpected shock which intensified the pain of her mother’s concomitant misfortunes. Cameron apparently clung to her art to ease her grief. The elegiac nature of the photographic image offered consolation; her work served as a substitute daughter for Cameron again in 1874, as it had ten years earlier, when Julia had first given her a camera.

35 After 1873 coffee was no longer grown on the island of Ceylon; it has since become famous for its teas. The Camerons’ plantation today produces one of the world’s most coveted teas.

36 Of the few pictures that exist of the photographer herself, I have included the two most famous: one attributed to Lewis Carroll of Cameron in 1857 (fig. 67), and the other taken by her son H.H.H. Cameron in 1870, three and a half years before she wrote her autobiography and began work on the Illustrations (fig. 68).
In 1873 Cameron aroused the alarm of her sister Mia Jackson by proceeding with a major gallery retrospective of her work – the show she describes in the *Annals* as a lisping ten-year old child – shortly after losing her daughter. Cameron stubbornly did not yield to the conventions of social piety pressed upon her, determined that the show must go on. Mia Jackson wrote to her own daughter, the Julia whom Cameron had frequently photographed (fig. 73), expressing her consternation:

> I can not understand her doing such a thing at such a time – She is evidently bent upon carrying it out & therefore has not mentioned it to any of us for she knows what we must feel. It grieves me so I can scarcely bear to mention it [....] Had I known when she contemplated it I might have prevented it but who could have supposed that now she w[ould] have carried out such a scheme. (Nov. 17, 1873, Sussex MS Collection, qtd. in Cox 2006, 71)

Cameron apparently intended to expand the retrospective of her work to include her words as well as images through the account of her artistic career she called *Annals of My Glass House*.

**The Form of the Annals**

The form and content of the *Annals* presented problems for its author, who would not write confessional prose, yet could not avoid it; her autobiography reveals strong feelings in every sentence. Of necessity it was a personal account, as her photographic career was closely bound to the domestic geography of her life and could not be separated from it.
If there is a biblical subtext to Cameron’s *Annals*, as there often is in Victorian men’s autobiographies, it is a paradoxical combination of Adamic and Marian narratives. The photographer presents herself as a pioneering Adam, co-creator of a fictive world of tableaux vivants, giver of names to portraits and “allegorical” or genre images. She is also rebellious, more Lilith than Eve, bursting out of the prescribed roles of wife and mother, making photographs that violated the norms of the established art world in their unretouched technique and soft focus. Further, Cameron captured and marketed the heads of famous men in her portraits as ambitiously as if she had been a big game hunter.

She liked to refer to herself as a “Priestess of the Sun,” implying her elevation to an elite and privileged status, in possession of arcane knowledge and the ability to perform secret rites. She claimed competitively that her works surpassed Tennyson’s, whom she designated the “Sun of the Earth” (Olsen 227). However, being Priestess of the Sun implied that she played a passive part as a vessel, conduit, or handmaiden to the source of light. Cameron thus simultaneously claimed and avoided taking credit for her photographs, asserting ownership while also expressing indebtedness to numerous others: her sitters, her friends, and positive reviewers, for her success. She was proud of what she had created, yet humbly suggested that her models “had entirely made” (*Annals* 3) her pictures, while she, as photographer, had been but a lucky witness. Though an independent woman with strong opinions and bossy ways, Cameron featured the maternal and collaborative aspects of her art in the *Annals* – a strategy which undercut the importance of her talent but recognized the importance of others to the production of her work. 37 She tells us that the “first successes in [her] out-of-focus pictures were a fluke” due to the lucky convergence of

37 There are numerous recorded examples of her unconventional behavior giving offense, such as when arriving to photograph Carlyle in London, she barged into his bedroom where he had gone to change his pants (Olsen 199), the conversational bombshells she dropped, having her piano carried to Tennyson’s house without warning, supposedly for use by Edward Lear for the evening’s entertainment, applying decoupage to her host’s furniture while an overnight guest, etc.
circumstances and the cooperation of her sitters (*Annals* 4). She goes on to describe how she "ran all over the house to search for gifts" for Annie, the model, to thank her for her "having entirely made the photograph." By giving attribution to others, Cameron avoids assuming the pose of solitary genius and elevates the role of her sitters and the sun as co-creators.  

Sharing or transferring credit for authorship can be a protective maneuver for a woman, used as a subterfuge to gain creative freedom without disturbing a restrictive patriarchal social order. Cameron functioned like the director of a theatrical production in the making of her photographic tableaux vivants, assuming a relatively anonymous position off stage, sharing creativity while maintaining artistic control, neither a compliant cog in the hierarchy nor an intentional subversive.

Cameron’s career was deeply embedded in the physical structure and affective relationships of her life: she found ways to root her work within her approximation of a Victorian woman’s life, amending and adapting it to her needs, apparently insensitive to the criticism that incurred. Her domestic space doubled as a professional workplace: the glass house in which she worked was a converted chicken coop, her darkroom a coal house; many of her maids, family members, and neighbors posed as models, and most of her props were taken from her own wardrobe and home furnishings. She presided, a matriarchal presence, over the domestic aspects of her craft, including the culinary whipping of egg whites for the albumen prints, the maternal disciplining of her sitters in her studio, the menial and

---

38 Woolf’s performer, the balladeer Anon suggests that the theatrical players and audience participate in creating a theatrical performance, that it is co-created by all present, like Cameron’s photographs. Using photographic vocabulary, Woolf described the process of her writing as collaboration with “invisible rays”: “I could snapshot what I mean by some image; I am a porous vessel afloat on sensation; a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays” (MOB 133).

39 I am thinking here of the medieval mystics who employed similar rationales, e.g. Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen who claimed the creative power of God was writing through them. Julian became ill when she could not write – and cured when she put pen to paper – which she took to be evidence her writing was desired by God.
burdensome drawing of numerous cans of water from the well for the washing of the plates, and the “cooking” of the negatives in the sun to produce her images.

Cameron's Early Life

When she took up photography as a career, Cameron's life began to follow a uniquely individual course. Prior to 1863 she had lived a life centered on her family and friends. Born in 1815, the daughter of James Pattle and Adeline de l'Etang Pattle in Calcutta, she was the only plain one of the seven beautiful Pattle sisters. Julia Margaret stood behind her camera, peering through its lens, capturing others' beauty while avoiding the world's gaze. Herself the mother of five sons and one daughter, adoptive mother of six additional children, and great aunt of numerous nieces and nephews, Cameron nevertheless had ample energy left over to befriend outstanding artists, authors, and leaders of the time, as well as numerous passing strangers.

Her husband, Charles Hay Cameron, succeeded Macaulay to the Council of India and served as President of the Council of Education in Bengal, from which position he instituted a curriculum in the native schools that privileged canonical works in English and banned indigenous literature. In 1835 he published Two Essays: “On the Sublime and the Beautiful” and “On Dueling” – both of which reflect his pragmatic approach to life, which

---

40 See Ch. 4 of Gauri Viswanathan's Masks of Conquest for a discussion of C.H. Cameron's colonialist efforts in “reforming” Bengali education.
was not always shared by his spouse, who was more deeply influenced by her passions and faith.

Julia Margaret energetically extended her domestic activities while living in India to include virtually becoming the hostess for the new British governor in 1844 when he arrived in the country unaccompanied by his wife. She also raised a considerable sum for the victims of the Irish potato famine, published a translation of Burger’s popular poem *Lenore*, and allegedly wrote half a novel -- which she abandoned in impatience. Though it required long exposure time and hours of work in achieving each image, photography was a better fit with her personality and talents than novel-writing. She articulated her emotions and artistic principles more effectively in images than in words.

Cameron believed ferociously in her work and felt that her photographs were national treasures. In the *Annals* she refers to taking her stunning photographs of Sir John Herschel (fig. 69) as “giving his portrait to the nation” (*Annals* 11). She was not shy or afraid of publicity; on the contrary, she sought it out as a way of giving photography its just due. Having recognized depths of character in the faces of the men and women she photographed, she believed that she was enlarging English history by permanently recording images that portrayed the “greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man” (*Annals* 11). Together, her earliest portraits constitute a pantheon of great heads. In the latter years of her career her work evolved to the composition of tableaux vivants as often as portraits.

An assured sense of entitlement derived from her exotic roots and foreign upbringing, combined with an eager and generous personality, possessed of what Tennyson described as “wild, beaming benevolence” (Ovenden 3), allowed Cameron to do many things.

---

41 “[N]ational treasures” is the phrase Cameron used to describe them in an uncatalogued letter to Henry Cole in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum, read by Mark Haworth-Booth in a lecture on Cameron delivered at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in March 1998.
that would normally have been prohibited – or not attempted – by other women of her time. Her husband’s frequent absences due to extended trips to Ceylon left her to her own resources: she traveled, entertained, went out for evenings, conducted her business, maintained her studio, sold her photographs, made arrangements for portrait sittings and gallery shows, signed up attractive passers-by as potential models, and staged private theatricals, while running the family’s large household. In addition, she happily took over the lives of her family and friends whenever she felt she could help them do a better job than they were on their own.

A Determined Lady Amateur

Cameron was proud of her amateur status: being a professional photographer in the nineteenth century carried a stigma. It designated one as belonging to a class of workers, many of them itinerant, who supported themselves by earning money through targeting their subjects, often opportunistically – equivalent to today’s “commercial photographer” – the taker of special occasion photographs and portraits. Cameron considered herself an artist who pursued photography as high art; her wares were not available by requisition or retainer. Oil portraits were out of reach for most of the population; photographic portraits were promoted as an adequate substitute, offering a realistic, if not always flattering, likeness for a reasonable price. An amateur was accepted in society as genteel and artistic; the professional photographer was too often seen as a hack who pandered to the public for a living. As she wrote to her “patron saint” Sir John Herschel in 1870, Cameron’s choice not to become a commercial photographer was grounded in the fear that doing so would cause her to lose the ability to choose her sitters (Feb. 6, 1870, archives of the Royal Society,
London). The liberty to photograph what she wanted in the way she chose was crucial to her.

Two pioneering women photographers, Clementina, Lady Hawarden and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, both “lady amateurs,” forged a path for Cameron, though neither pursued the art as deeply, extensively, or famously as she. Photography in its early years was one of the few endeavors in which women and men could participate together: Benjamin Brecknell Turner’s beautiful images of outdoor scenes, including his striking negatives of trees and the Crystal Palace, are excellent examples of the work of a Victorian gentleman amateur, one who could take his equipment outdoors. Photography was an art in which it was possible for the amateur to surpass the professional.

Cameron’s need to sell her photographs increased over the span of her career, though she never managed to do more than cover her costs. She promoted the sale of her work to the owners of the well-respected Colnaghi Gallery in London, with whom she entered into an agreement in 1864. But even while doing this and maintaining a studio in the newly established Victoria and Albert (then the South Kensington Museum), she clung to her status as a “lady amateur.” Their unfinished, unretouched quality, combined with their soft focus, gives her tableaux vivants a singular appearance, marking them as unique, unschooled art.

Commercial photography was associated with the emerging middle class, a “middle-brow art” that offered external objectification and identified the sitter through coded visual

---

42 It is available for viewing on the Victoria and Albert website: [http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/34108-popup.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/34108-popup.html)

43 Cameron was not a good businesswoman: she gave away many of her photographs, which caused Emily Tennyson to write to her in alarm, “I do not mean to let you ruin yourself by giving the photographs away…. I see that I shall have to set up a shop for the sale of photographs myself all for your benefit” (qtd. in Anny Thackeray Ritchie, *From Friend to Friend* 27).
signs – a sort of visual biography. The small carte de visite was the most popular photographic substitute amongst the middle and working classes for a portrait executed in oils. Philippa Wright has recently demonstrated that Cameron produced a significant number of cartes de visite, mostly as advertising promotions for her larger photos, though she focused mainly on her celebrated large-plate images in which she attempted to apply “High Art” standards and techniques copied from classic works of art. The subject of her portraiture gradually evolved from famous men into literary, biblical, and mythological illustrations enacted by friends, family, and local villagers. Because photography was a new medium, Cameron was not closely constrained by tradition and precedent – there were no schools, suggested models and themes, or sense that past photographic work would always outshine what was being produced in the present. She was free to make her own distinctive way through this promising new art, borrowing from the past and forging a future.

“Poetry, Philosophy, and Beauty” in the Annals

The writing in the Annals becomes more intensely emotional after a dozen pages, at which point Cameron confronts an important spirit who presides over the work -- the invisible presence that influenced her life as well as the final phase of her photographic career. In the last section of her autobiography, Cameron enumerates the important men from whom she has received help and support professionally and personally: her husband

44 American Civil War photographer Matthew Brady was illiterate and used his camera instead of a pen to record the scenes of his life. Pierre Bourdieu’s book, Photography: A Middle-brow Art explores the topic of photography’s social meanings.

(figs. 12, 14, 50, & 52), Henry Taylor (fig. 79), Sir John Herschel (fig. 69), and G.F. Watts (fig. 70). All have praised her work and sat willingly to her in various personae.

As her “Teacher and High Priest,” Sir John Herschel initiated Cameron’s interest in photography when, at twenty-one, she arrived on the Cape of Good Hope recovering from a lung infection. There she met the Herschels and her husband Charles Hay Cameron, who was visiting them. Sir John Herschel is often referred to as the father of photography, having coined the terms “positive,” “negative,” and “photograph,” and instituted the use of sodium thiosulfate as a “hypo” or fixing agent. His friendship with Cameron lasted thirty-one years till his death in 1871. During this time he was in frequent correspondence with her, mailing parcels of chemicals and letters containing descriptions of the photographic work that he and Wm. Henry Fox Talbot were undertaking. “I was then residing in Calcutta, and scientific discoveries sent to that then benighted land were water to the parched lips of the starved” (Annals 12), Cameron reports, in an enthusiastic mixture of metaphors. Over the years, Herschel also advised her on ways to improve her work, offering friendly critiques of her photographs; Cameron includes one of his letters in her autobiography (Annals 13).

When the Herschels moved back to England, they were frequent visitors to Dimbola. Herschel and Taylor are associated in Cameron’s mind with the birth of her youngest child, Henry Herschel Hay Cameron (1865-1911), who became a professional photographer after having abandoned a career in acting. Taylor, Herschel, and her sister Virginia Somers-Cocks were the baby’s sponsors at his christening. G.F. Watts was also

---

46 Herschel was generally good natured and indulged Cameron’s interests. In 1835, the year before Cameron arrived at the Cape, he had been the butt of a newspaper hoax published in the New York Sun, in which a series of articles attributed to him reported the discovery of life on the moon, consisting of a range of odd creatures and Bat-men. Herschel ignored the sensationalism and persevered cheerfully and with dignity to work on his astronomy and translate the Iliad.

47 Note that none of her children was named after Tennyson. In addition to Henry Herschel, another one of Cameron’s sons was named after a famous friend: Gov. Hardinge. Her daughter was given her mother’s name. Perhaps naming a son after Tennyson would have indicated an admiration for the poet that she did not want to admit. She conferred a different, more memorable kind of immortality on Tennyson’s sons Lionel and Hallam as well as their father; ultimately, by photographing them.
present that day, having recently built his thatched-roof house, “the Briary,” down the road from Dimbola and Farringford after his divorce from Ellen Terry. Cameron observes of the group gathered around the baptismal font – in Mortlake near the Taylors’ home – that “surely Poetry, Philosophy, and Beauty were never more fitly represented” (Annals 12-13). Others may not have completely agreed with that fond observation, most notably the Poet Laureate

Conspicuous by his absence from the list of attendees is her friend of fourteen years and next-door neighbor, Alfred Tennyson, who, if we look closely at her writing and illustrations of his poems, is associated in her mind with the ending of artistic illusion as much as its creation.

**Tennyson’s Role in the Annals**

Tennyson is invoked throughout the Annals, though not mentioned by name till the last page. He is arguably the most important character in Cameron’s autobiography. Throughout the Annals, she focuses and frames her photographic career through poetry, chiefly Tennyson’s verse, which “had become text to the nations.” She saw the world largely through the lens of his words. She quotes from “The Gardener’s Daughter; or, The Pictures” twice in the first two pages of her autobiography (Annals 1, 2), and once later in praise of Henry Taylor. She also uses lines from Tennyson’s Maud to describe Mary Hillier (Annals 7). In the second paragraph of the Annals she sets up the non-negotiable boundaries to her self-disclosure using his words:

Be wise, not easily forgiven

Are those, who setting wide the doors that bar
The secret bridal chamber of the heart

Let in the day (Annals 1)

As did Tennyson, Cameron felt ambivalence about exposing her inner self to the public, and wanted to preserve her anonymity while also disseminating her work. Tennyson objected to her portraits, which were such good likenesses that they enabled the public to recognize him easily.

In the Annals, Cameron attempts to “restrain the overflow of [her] heart” and “simply” “clothe in light” the professional history of her career. She states that she will not, on any of the difficult subjects of her personal life, “[l]et in the day.” In a telling metaphor, she likens her autobiography to a glass plate negative, only some parts of which she will illuminate, indicating the desire to exercise control over the image she presents of herself. However, as the writing progresses, she increasingly loses control.

Cameron drew on the words of two other major British poets in the Annals: she slightly misquotes Wordsworth: “my heart has leapt up like a rainbow in the sky,” and refers to Milton on fame: “the last infirmity of noble mind” (Annals 5), but it is Tennyson’s thoughts and words that influence her the most, and whose verse she uses to express her thoughts and feelings.

Cameron had been clearly planning to make the Annals longer -- she tells us that she will return later to the subject of Mary Hillier, but does not. As soon as she begins to address her friendship with Tennyson and to describe his opinion of her photographs, her writing breaks off and is not continued.

Earlier in the Annals, Cameron employed a metaphor that raised her to a level comparable to the Poet Laureate’s. In describing her disappointment at not having won a prize in an important photographic competition in Scotland, she reports how the praise that
she received from other “Artists” who “crowned [her] with laurels” (Annals 5), neutralized her feelings of failure. By mentioning that she has being crowned with praise equivalent to verbal laurels, Cameron installed herself as England’s Photographer Laureate. She continues to practice self-repair in this passage by savoring the encouragement she received from the painter G.F. Watts, which made her feel she “had wings to fly with” (Annals 13) – possibly an allusion to the winged crowd of hopes that flutter about in the lines from “The Gardener’s Daughter” (Annals 2).48

Tennyson is present by implication whenever Cameron writes about Sir Henry Taylor. She calls Tennyson “[o]ur chief friend” (Annals 7) and applies lines from his poem “Locksley Hall” to describe Taylor’s compliance in sitting for her: “’The chord of self with trembling/ Passed like music out of sight’” (Annals 7). Apparently, Tennyson’s “chord of self” did not yield as easily to her will: he not only refused to sit for any of her literary photographs, he allowed her to take few portraits of him of any sort. Though Cameron must have realized that it would be unseemly for a Laureate to compromise the dignity of his office by appearing in character roles in her photographs – especially since they were often publicly displayed for sale in galleries and store windows– his perceived recalcitrance nevertheless hurt her deeply. She notes in the Annals that Taylor, in contrast to Tennyson, “[r]egardless of the possible dread that sitting to my fancy might be making a fool of himself, he, with greatness which belongs to unselfish affection, consented [...]” (Annals 7).49 He “consented in turn to be Friar Lawrence with Juliet (fig. 85), Prospero with Miranda (fig. 84), Ahasuerus with Queen Esther, to hold my poker as his scepter, and do whatever I

48 Cameron misquotes the lines, a significant slip that will be discussed further in Chapter Four of this project.

49 Taylor was not the only “great man” to pose for a genre or allegorical photograph: G.F. Watts sat to “The Whisper of the Muse” (fig. 70) among many other tableaux, Charles Cameron appeared as King Lear, and even Sir John Herschel complied by allowing Cameron to shampoo and dishevel his hair and then make him wear a skull cap, which Weaver identifies as “the velvet cap of a German Nazarene painter, even if [Herschel] thought it was only the cap of a Paterfamilias” (Weaver 20).
desired of him.” She warmly calls Taylor her “great good friend,” and attributes her maid Mary Ryan’s fortunate marriage to his generosity and compliance in posing for the photograph in which he played Prospero to Ryan’s Miranda.⁵₀

Cameron implies the superiority of Taylor’s accomplishments over Tennyson’s by calling Ryan’s marriage the result of Henry Taylor’s “idyll of real life,” suggesting that his idyll was more efficacious than Tennyson’s epic. No real life fairy tale issued from Tennyson’s Idylls, she implies, as did the “marriage of bliss with children worthy of being photographed” (Annals 8) from Taylor’s. Cameron likely had Tennyson in mind when she wrote of taking photographs of Thomas Carlyle (fig. 74) and Sir John Herschel (fig. 69) that:

> When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man. The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer. (Annals 9)

Her enormous admiration and affection for the Laureate is everywhere evident in the Annals. He is the star of her collection of heroes - her pantheon of “great men.” Her friendship with Tennyson was mixed with hurt and irritation caused by his restrained praise and lack of agreement that she always knew what was best for him.⁵¹

---

⁵₀ At an exhibition of Cameron’s work, Sir Henry Cotton saw the portrait of Prospero and Miranda, fell in love with Mary Ryan (who played Miranda), a poor Irish girl Cameron had taken in and raised with her own children, and immediately determined that she would be his bride. They were married in August of 1867.

⁵¹ There are numerous recorded anecdotes to illustrate her taking over his life. Joy Melville describes the most famous one thusly: “Once during an outbreak of smallpox in the village, [Cameron] discovered that Tennyson had refused to be vaccinated. She went straight to the doctor and asked him to accompany her to Farringford. Spotting them, Tennyson promptly bolted upstairs and locked himself in his study, whereupon Julia stood at the bottom of the stairs and shouted up at regular intervals ‘You’re a coward, Alfred, a coward!’ until Tennyson shouted back, ‘Woman, go away, I will be vaccinated tomorrow.’ He was, but unfortunately the vaccine was faulty and he took some time to recover from an inflamed leg and a fever” (52).
"The Dirty Monk"

In the final section of the Annals, Cameron explains how helpful and encouraging her friendship with Sir John Herschel had been for her work. She evenhandedly repeats his evaluation of her photographs, both his praise and criticism and describes how she had to wait three years after his return to England to “take this noble head of [her] great master.” While she was waiting, she mentions almost casually, she “took another immortal head, that of Alfred Tennyson, which he himself called the ‘Dirty Monk’” and which Henry Taylor deemed “as fine as Alfred Tennyson’s finest poem” – comparing Cameron’s work favorably to the Laureate’s. Tennyson’s irreverent title for the photo was likely his way of teasing Cameron about her pretentions to high-art portraiture, although as Gerhard Joseph has pointed out, the Laureate was in reality not impeccably groomed, a characteristic about which he often joked (1988, 43-8).

Tennyson wrote in the bottom margin of “the Dirty Monk” that it was his favorite portrait of himself, adding devilishly, “except one by Mayall” – the American portrait photographer. As she records this slight in her Annals, Cameron becomes so incensed and hurt by the memory, quite likely designed to pique her, that she can no longer contain her distress, though Tennyson’s remark had been uttered five years earlier. The tone changes

---

52 According to Tennyson’s friend William Allingham, on one occasion Cameron turned up at his house with such a large sheaf of photographs for him to sign that she had had to take a carriage to accommodate them. She also brought several new pens with her, so he could have no excuse for not signing. He greeted her with the words, “Julia Cameron, Julia Cameron, you are a dreadful woman” (Diary 127).

"Tennyson was more irritated than amused when Julia urged him to sign her photographs of him, aware that they increased in value if he did so.... Because Tennyson disliked being bothered for his signature like this, Julia thought nothing of the extra labour of forging his signature on the prints" (Joy Melville 78).
drastically in this final paragraph of the *Annals*. Instead of laughing off Tennyson’s qualified praise as proof of his affectionate, teasing intimacy with her, made in retribution for her constantly praising Henry Taylor’s poetry to him, she protests vigorously and helplessly to her reader, as if able to refute the backhanded compliment with her words. In order to repeat his high estimation of the photograph, which he knew she would not be able to resist doing, she must also repeat his preference for John J.E. Mayall. At this point in her writing of the *Annals*, Cameron abandons her project, having been derailed by the memory of Tennyson’s impudence. Comparing Mayall’s portrait to hers, she tells us, is analogous to “comparing one of Mme. Tussaud’s waxwork heads to one of Woolner’s ideal heroic busts” (*Annals* 14).53

---

**John J.E. Mayall**

John J. E. Mayall, an American daguerreotypist, who relocated to London in 1846, had been permitted to take the portrait of Sir John Herschel within three years after his arrival in Britain; a privilege which Cameron, ostensibly Herschel’s protégée, was not granted until 1867.54 Mayall, after introducing a style of portraiture in which the sitter’s head appears in focus while the surroundings gradually become less distinct – and thus possibly influencing Cameron’s “big head” style of portrait photography – soon switched to the profitable enterprise of making cartes de visite. He was able to obtain permission to photograph the royal family: his 1860 album of them reportedly sold sixty thousand copies.

---

53 *Ironically, Cameron had thought highly enough of Mayall’s work in 1855 to purchase one of his portraits, frame it, and give it to Tennyson (Emily Tennyson, *Journal* 55).*

54 *Frederick Scott Archer developed the wet collodion-glass plate process in 1848, which Cameron began using in 1863. Possibly the chronology of photographic technique influenced Herschel’s choice of daguerreotype over collodion emulsion, which allowed unlimited duplications of the image taken.*
Mayall’s most famous photo of him is more flattering to Tennyson than “The Dirty Monk.” He looks much younger and more carefully groomed, and the image appears polished to perfection, every defect of his appearance removed. Cameron, by comparison, refused to touch up any of her photographs on the grounds that they were more artistic and authentic if they appeared as they were taken, “from life,” a term she characteristically inscribed as a caption under her prints. On the unfinished nature of her work, she remarked rather defensively that, “I could have [the spots] touched out but I am the only photographer who always issues untouched photographs and artists for this reason amongst others value my photographs” (Melville 2003, 85).

Tennyson complained that Cameron’s portraits emphasized the bags under his eyes. They did indeed: “The Dirty Monk” is sharply focused on the features of Tennyson’s face, revealing its every flaw. She refused to perfect her “immortal head, that of Alfred Tennyson” by altering his face in any way.

**Mme. Tussaud and Thomas Woolner**

Cameron would have been well advised not to extend the comparison to Woolner and Tussaud, as they brought up associations that upset her, especially images associated with the museum of wax replicas.

Mme Tussaud’s waxworks opened in London in 1802, at which time it was rumored that the eponymous founder had taken death masks of famous persons, using them to make wax models with which to entertain the public in a “museum” that resembled a freak show. Cameron’s association of Mayall’s photograph with “one of Madame Tussaud’s waxwork heads” – on display, she implies, as commercialized recreation pandering to the masses – is
an indication of the strength of her feelings of jealousy, hurt and outrage toward Tennyson.
The wax replica of the Poet Laureate on exhibit at Mme Tussaud’s, though colorful and
perhaps quite accurate, was to her a meretricious imitation, not authentic art. To
counterbalance the Mayall and Tussaud linkage, as anodyne she associates her ”Dirty Monk”
favorably to “one of Woolner’s ideal heroic busts.”

Cameron’s identification with the successful Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas
Woolner reveals her ambition and proprietary feelings toward Tennyson. She was well
aware that by agreeing to sit for him, Tennyson had established Woolner’s career as a
sculptor. She hoped he would do the same for her. Woolner had reproduced Tennyson’s
image in four media. Turning from painting to making portraits in metal and stone, he
completed six versions (two busts and four medallions) of his friend’s likeness, and was
able to profit continually thereafter from the sale of their castings. Woolner’s sculpture is
spotless and flattering. In addition to creating a good likeness – he achieved “an accuracy in
modeling realistic detail that was without parallel in contemporary sculpture” (Parris 82).
Of Tennyson’s bust, Woolner said that he had had the intention ”’to do such a likeness of a
remarkable man that admirers of his centuries hence may feel it to be true and thankful to
have a record which they can believe in’” (Ibid 166). Cameron’s portrait of Tennyson has
become better known in the twenty-first century than Woolner’s sculpture of him.

The friendship between Woolner and Tennyson began in 1848 and continued for
the duration of their lives.55 Though Cameron was Tennyson’s “dearest woman friend;
almost the only woman outside his family whom he called by her Christian name, and who
called him in turn by his” (Ford 2003, 11), she never achieved the solidly comfortable and
easy relationship with the Tennysons that Woolner had – perhaps because he was male, in

55 During that time Woolner became an admirer of Julia Jackson, Woolf’s mother, though she refused his
proposal of marriage. Coincidentally, her daughter Virginia Woolf sat for a portrait in Woolner’s studio years
later, wearing a dress of her mother’s.
possession of a very different temperament from hers, and did not live close to Tennyson, as
did she. He was discreetly charming, she forthright, explosive, and bossy. Tennyson
approved of Woolner’s and objected to Cameron’s portraits, “which are full of power but
hardly as flattering as a man once so handsome as the Laureate may wish his likeness to
be,” as Mary Brotherton, a friend of Emily Tennyson’s observed (Olsen 231).

Woolner also produced and sold a series of statuettes of Tennyson’s heroines in the
1860’s and early 1870’s, which consisted of miniature sculpted versions of the same figures
that Cameron later portrayed photographically. In addition to being a painter and sculptor,
Woolner was also a poet in his own right. He suggested the narrative plots that the Laureate
used for two of his major poems: “Enoch Arden” and “Aylmer’s Field.”

Cameron’s comparison of her photographs to Woolner’s “ideal heroic” busts
backfires for another reason: in evoking the mental image of the lurid, commercial
tawdriness of Tussaud’s waxworks across the Channel, Cameron reminds the reader of their
similarity to photographs. Tussaud’s sculptures were assumed to possess an uncanny
likeness to their subject matter and to appeal to an emerging middle class, as was
photography. In addition, both the waxworks and photographs in question were created by
entrepreneurial women. It would have been wiser for Cameron not to have mentioned
Woolner’s sculpture or Tussaud’s waxworks, both of whom were emotional triggers for her.

She abruptly stopped writing the Annals at this point, but Cameron continued the
conversation with Tennyson through her photographs of his work, published a few months
later. And though she could not make the Laureate himself obedient to her in life, she made
Tennyson’s poetry serve her photographic purposes through the publication of her two-
volume book, Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems.
Friends, Neighbors, and Competitive Collaborators

Competition was an inevitable element in the complex friendship between Tennyson and Cameron, most likely intensified by her knowledge that his Idylls had earned enough for him to buy his large home Farringford with its surrounding land, while her photographic Idylls could not even bring in sufficient returns to allow her family to remain in England. Cameron refused to be intimidated by Tennyson, and constantly strove to achieve an equal, if not more powerful position in their relationship.

Her histrionic nature and fondness for theatre often caused the photographer to blur the boundaries between drama and “real” life.\(^\text{56}\) Always interested in exploiting the dramatic possibilities of the moment, in the spring of 1873 Cameron came up with the idea that Tennyson, whom she called the “Doge of Freshwater,” should be symbolically wed to the sea, as was the Doge of Venice in an annual celebration. So she made a floral wreath to use as a crown for the ceremony, similar to the one the May Queen wears in the Illustrations (fig. 33), this one made of red and white blossoms. Tennyson “protested vigorously but in vain,” ultimately powerless against her inexorable energy, finally gave in and allowed himself to be joined to the sea “with as much dignity as he could muster” (Hill 141). Some of his resistance to the crowning was probably due to her relentless insistence on such an outlandish event, but another possibly irritating element of the ceremony – to the British Victorian mind -- would have been its feminizing associations. As Ruskin points out, a crown of flowers is suitable for women and girls, but not for men: “Men of supreme power and thoughtfulness” will prefer “crowns of leaves or crowns of thorns, not crowns of flowers”

---

\(^{56}\) As we shall see in discussing Between the Acts, Woolf similarly confuses this distinction: the narratorial voice asks, “Was it, or was it not the play?” (BTA 76) when the action begins on stage.
("Sesame and Lilies" qtd. in Nunn 1996, 34). The Laureate had already earned his laurels and did not need her to bestow any further honors on him.

Cameron's strong sense of entitlement allowed her to feel justified in taking liberties with others besides Tennyson. She was, in her "dynamic and all-compelling individuality, her unconventionality, and her outspoken frankness," an exhausting and inexorable woman, according to Anny (Anne) Thackeray's daughter Hester Fuller (29). As George Du Maurier observed, "[…] I find her delightful but don't think she would suit as a permanent next door neighbor for the next 30 years or so unless one could now & then get away" (qtd. in Ford 2003, 31). It is likely that most people who spent much time with Cameron felt similarly.

For protection against his next door neighbor's relentlessly energetic personality, the Laureate developed several strategies of self-defense, which frequently involved teasing her. In response, Cameron did not pass up the opportunity to mention her opinion that Emily was the superior Tennyson (Olsen 227). Nevertheless, the two neighbors managed to remain constant and close friends.

Tennyson depended on Cameron's energy and admiration to push him forward in his work. After she left for Ceylon he attempted to replace her with another enthusiastic and pushy female friend, Mrs. Greville, who turned out to be a not entirely satisfactory surrogate, under whose guidance he began to write plays (Martin 509-10). The effect of the legendary “black blood” of the Tennysons had been successfully neutralized by Cameron's resilient, optimistic spirit and redoubtable self-confidence.
Cameron’s Book of Theatrical Scenes

Mrs. Cameron’s Amateur Theatricals

Cameron harbored a lifelong love of the theatre, though she only rarely attended professionally staged plays. She came from a family who had for generations regularly performed amateur theatricals for their own entertainment, a tradition carried on by succeeding generations. The Camerons’ son Henry Herschel Hay attempted to become an actor later in life, but he had a “defect in his eyes which finally compelled him to abandon an actor’s life” (Ellison 72), and, according to Victoria Olsen, could not have pursued acting professionally without jeopardizing the Camerons’ social position.57 Almost immediately upon moving into Dimbola, Cameron had commissioned a thatched-roof cottage to be built for the express purpose of staging theatrical performances. The plays that she produced and directed there consisted mostly of melodramas and romances, however Emily Tennyson recorded in her diary in January of 1867 that her sons performed a farce written by T.J. Williams with the Cameron boys, entitled *Ici On Parle Francais* (257). Several of the printed programs for their theatrical productions are still in existence.58 Tristram Powell added a portrait of Lionel Tennyson dressed in an ornate velvet jacket and a tricorn hat, his right

57 Virginia Woolf, part of Cameron’s theatre-loving family, has a character in *Between the Acts*, Mrs. Manresa, enthusiastically express support for amateur village theatricals: “We’ll have a play of our own […] We’ll show ‘em […] how we do it. The play will be as good as anything seen in London” (BTA 106-7).

58 Colin Ford explores the plays in detail in the section of his essay on Cameron, “Geniuses, Poets, and Painters” (Cox 2006, 32-34), he calls “Putting on a show.”
hand resting on the hilt of a sword to the second edition of Woolf’s *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* a (Pl. 42, Appendix B, fig. 71). The image prefigures Cameron’s *Illustrations* photos of King Arthur ready to depart for battle (figs. 24 & 28). This image of Lionel is a rare “playbill” photo; Cameron almost never photographed characters or scenes from her amateur theatricals. The caption for the photo reads: “Lionel Tennyson in the character of Marquis de St. Cash has acted in Payable on Demand at the private theatricals at Mrs. Cameron’s thatched house in aid of the Freshwater Village Hospital.” An older Lionel Tennyson appears in the part of Robin in the second volume of the *Illustrations*, with “The May Queen” (fig. 36), looking off to the left of the frame with a desultory stare.

Cameron’s fierce determination to produce successful plays caused her to be involved in every detail of her theatricals. One summer she helped the local youth put on *Our Wife*, a melodramatic romance. According to one of the young players, “Mrs. Cameron’s excitement and enthusiasm were greater than can be described, the audience was expected to be large, and the tickets were sold rapidly. Her studio was deserted for her parlor, in which daily rehearsals took place” (Ellison 81). At one point, when things in rehearsal were going in a way that did not meet Cameron’s standards, she jumped onto the stage and enacted the man’s part of the passionate love scene herself, feeling that her son had not performed it well enough. “‘There!’ she exclaimed, rising out of breath and triumphant. ‘That’s the way to do it!’” (Ibid 81).

There were rehearsals and evening performances during the Christmas and Easter holidays, with the younger members of the Cameron family as well as Lionel and Hallam taking part. Tennyson himself “was seldom absent, for he loved the stage” (*Memoir* II: 85). The poet was not always appreciative of her efforts, however: “Mrs. Cameron’s wildly

---

59 This is a misquotation on the part of Tristram Powell: the correct title of his role is “Marquis de St. Cast” and the title of the play is actually *Payment on Demand* (Colin Ford, in Cox 2006, 33).
romantic ideas and performances used to call forth growls of amused dissatisfaction from him,” according to Emily Ritchie (Mem II: 86).

Cameron’s photographic tableaux were a natural extension of the amateur theatricals that she staged for the neighborhood’s entertainment. Both photography and amateur theatricals were popular middle-class pastimes for Victorian families, but by the 1850's, tableaux vivants were starting to “seem vulgar” (Olsen 167), and by the 1870's, when Cameron staged the Illustrations, there was a backlash against costumed portraits, which were then falling out of favor, as they were considered to be too theatrical. In the mid-1800’s O.J. Reijlander compared H.P. Robinson’s narrative photographs, especially the melodramatic “Fading Away,”61 to professional theatre, but by the close of the century, Robinson’s narrative images were sharply criticized by another photographer, P.H. Emerson, identified unfavorably by him with amateur theatricals. Emerson, however, was a fan of Cameron’s soft-focus images, which he praised in his essay on her work in Sun Artists.62

Cameron, however, was delighted to produce her local amateur theatricals and her photographic tableaux, seemingly insensitive to the taint of popular sentiment. Unlike veteran theatre buff Lewis Carroll, who attended many plays in London, Cameron had no memory of professionally-acted performances to draw on for comparison, so she put together scenes in any way she saw fit, with what was available in the way of actors, props, setting, and costumes for her productions on stage or in front of her camera. There is only

---

61 The photo can be viewed at: http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?Item=5446

62 Perhaps Emerson’s disapproval arose from his own style of unposed photography of the Norfolk broads and its people. Whatever its origin, Emerson’s critical essays had little effect: Ellen Handy observes the ironic outcome that “Robinson’s pictures remained largely the same before, during, and after Emerson’s challenge of his photographic position. He would not have guessed that he would be all but forgotten so quickly after his death, nor that it would be Emerson whose ideas would be associated with the rise of the American Photo-Secession rather than his own” (“Pictorial Beauties, Natural Truths, Photographic Practices,” in Pictorial Effect, Naturalistic Vision, ed. Ellen Handy [Norfolk, VA: The Chrysler Museum, 1994]. Emerson’s work led to modernism. Stieglitz, who spearheaded the Photo-Secession with Holland Day in the early twentieth century, also popularized Cameron’s images in Camera Works.
one confirmed instance of her having hired a model for her photographs ("Iago study from an Italian" Cox 2006, 296). In the Victorian art world, according to Victoria Olsen, "[t]here was Theater, and there was theater, and photographers tried to navigate between the professional and the amateur kinds, hoping to claim the prestige of the former and the popularity of the latter" (241). The performance of homemade, not polished professional scenes, was Cameron’s preference, as evidenced in the Illustrations, as it was for Woolf’s La Trobe in Between the Acts.

Famously hard to please, Tennyson was apparently satisfied with Cameron’s efforts, or so she would have her readers believe, remarking about the Illustrations that “our great Laureate Alfred Tennyson himself is very much pleased with this ideal representation of his Idylls [...]” (qtd. in Olsen 232). Cameron’s friendship with the Laureate had enabled her to obtain permission from him to illustrate his verse, a protected and regulated subject, for which permission was available to few.

Cameron was gifted at finding drama in the quotidian; daily life became high theatre at Dimbola during the making of the Illustrations. According to one of the local youths, “Freshwater in those days seethed with intellectual life. The Poet was, of course, the centre, and that remarkable woman, Mrs. Cameron, was stage manager of what was, for us young people, a great drama. For Tennyson was still writing the Idylls of the King which had so greatly moved the whole country, and we felt that we were in the making of history [...]” (qtd. in Fuller 34). As in Between the Acts, theatrical scenes occurred both on and off stage at Freshwater Bay.

63 The photograph can be viewed at: <commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Photographs_by_Julia_Margaret_Cameron>
**Cameron’s Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems**

When Cameron undertook to illustrate the *Idylls of the King*, it was ostensibly at the Poet Laureate’s request. She describes the incident thusly: “About three months ago Alfred Tennyson walked into my room saying ‘Will you think it a trouble to illustrate my *Idylls* for me?’ I answered laughing ‘Now you know, Alfred, that *I* know that it is immortality to me to be bound up with you; that although I bully you, I have a corner of worship for you in my heart.’ & so I consented —.” If this story was not concocted, or at least embroidered, by Cameron, and if Tennyson did indeed ask his friend and neighbor to create a set of illustrations for him, her response reveals not only her shrewd appraisal of the advantages of being linked to his fame, but also the unembarrassed description of her relationship with him as being badgering, exploitative, and affectionately worshipful. Her response was swift: the fruits of her labor, the two-volume set of *Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems*, plus a miniature edition, were completed in less than a year after his request.

Though she wished for financial success, Cameron seemed determined to give her books the status of art through their limited edition, time-consuming production, and costly construction. Carol Armstrong points out that the contents of the *Illustrations*, with its combination of lithography and photography, oscillates between the handmade and the mechanically reproduced, and describes Cameron as

---

64 Note that he did not ask for illustrations of the other poems; the extra images were Cameron’s idea.


66 The miniature edition was called *Illustrations by Julia Margaret Cameron of Alfred Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems*. Cameron put her own name in front of Tennyson’s in this second title. The miniature edition’s sole distribution was among friends and family.
[...] vying with the Tennysonian machine she set out to serve, treating his mass published text as a privately owned book that she is licensed as a reader to underline, mark up, and copy out, dreaming the text and envisioning it as she chooses. (Scenes 369)

The liberties that Cameron took in presenting the Laureate’s poetry turned the verse excerpts into a new text, one populated mostly by women. The Illustrations, intentionally or not, critiques the ideology of chivalry which permeated the roots of Victorian society.

The first volume of Cameron’s Illustrations, published just in time for purchase as a Christmas gift book in 1874, did not live up to her hopes and expectations that it would sell well. When she began making pictures for the second volume early in 1875, Cameron knew that for economic reasons she would very soon be moving to Ceylon, where she and her husband were the island’s major landowners. Their coffee plantation there had been afflicted by a blight they could not eradicate with every means available.

Her inability to make a difference in the family budget through her photography was frustrating to this determined artist, who believed so completely in the value of her pursuit. Sale of the Illustrations was the last hope for significant remuneration in her photographic career. The price she asked was not exorbitant – it was high enough to yield a sufficient profit – but the book did not sell. Had it earned enough, the proceeds would have enabled her son Hardinge to finish his university education, which he was many decades later to return to Oxford to do, while in his sixties. It was no secret that Cameron would have

67 She wrote that “The photographs will be also sold singly at 16/- each to those who prefer single copies, then the set would come to ten pounds and eight shillings for the 13 pictures, whereas the book is only 6 gns.” (letter to Sir Edward Ryan 29 November 1874, qtd. in Ford 140.) By 1938, when Woolf published Three Guineas, guineas were used mostly for luxury items like art books. One wonders if Woolf had the Illustrations in mind when she chose the title for her polemic.
preferred to remain in England, near friends and family, especially her sisters Mia, Sophia, Virginia, and Sara.

One can speculate about why the books were not a financial success. The photos are not Cameron’s best, in terms of satisfying any received criteria of aesthetic value. Few of the images compare favorably with her popular earlier work, though their makeshift, flawed clumsiness, in its earnest seriousness, presents rich opportunity for extended study. They are kitschy and cluttered, unlike her popular “big head” portraits. Several qualities make the books unsuitable as gift books: their random, hodge-podge assortment of photographs, the uneven way in which the Idylls are represented as Tennyson wrote them, and the distracting details of the books’ construction, which call attention to their artifice and do not allow for absorption in the dramatic effect of the staged tableaux. The intensive effort required for their production was reflected in their cost to the buyer.

Critics have not greeted the Illustrations warmly: Helmut Gernsheim, whose 1948 monograph helped to reintroduce Cameron’s work to the public, called them “affected, ludicrous, and amateur” (1975, 83).68 Roger Fry joined the chorus of critics, deeming the books’ photographs “failures from an aesthetic viewpoint” (1992, 25). However, in spite of these problems of balance and pacing in the Illustrations, Cameron went ahead with their production, signaling a determined desire to publish her perspective, knowledge, and vision as a valedictory and legacy to be left behind at the end of her career. One motivation for the Illustrations may have been that Cameron wanted to continue her autobiography through images, not words. She was more adept at expressing herself through her photographs than prose, and the photographs of the Illustrations reveal aspects of her thought not available through other means.

68 In the front matter of his first edition, Gernsheim claims the Illustrations “show to what extent she diverted the camera from its true function [...] she seems altogether to have lost her sense of proportion [...] and in some cases her sentiment went beyond the bounds of what is acceptable to present-day taste” (1948 52).
Cameron knew how to please an audience; she must have suspected that these photographs would probably not do so. Over the course of the previous decade she had made several popular photographic illustrations of Tennyson's poems she could have reused for these volumes (e.g. the popular “Call, I follow” fig. C30). Instead, she insisted on making all the images anew for her book. The artistic and economic failure of the *Illustrations* is usually blamed on the limitations of the medium, her equipment, the particular time and place in which the photographs were made, and Cameron’s lack of skill and judgment. The public’s desire was for illustrations of the Laureate’s lyrical poetry that were idealized representations of dramatic scenes, not the realistic, concretely detailed sets that her photographic illustrations captured. The attempt to illustrate literature, especially poetry, with images of men and women in costume may have been a cutting-edge use for the new medium of the time, but it was not repeated.

In the twenty-first century, response to the *Illustrations* remains mixed. Though they have steadily gained popularity and pop up today in dozens of unexpected places – in advertisements, on book covers and internet sites, as backdrops for fashion shows, and as props on television and film dramas – Cameron’s photos have also recently been criticized for appearing “unredeemed by colour and looking like the faded prints of a local dramatic society production in an old newspaper” (Gilmour 222).

Photographic groupings with literary or classical aspirations were mocked for their artificiality and pretensions in the Victorian press even before Cameron’s career began. In 1857 James Payne satirized a typical family portrait composed in an affectedly “allegorical” way, reminiscent of some of Cameron’s images, in which were featured

---

There are other pre-1874 illustrations by Cameron of Tennyson’s poems beside Mary Hillier as Elaine with the caption “Call, I Follow” (fig. 91). These include the early, full-figure shot of Rose, “The Gardener’s Daughter,” “Lady Clara Vere de Vere”, “Oenone”, “The Rosebud Garden of Girls (fig. 77),” “St Agnes,” (fig 89), “Bodicea,” and “The Passion Flower at the Gate.”
[...the] tallest girl in sheet and wreath, with bread knife and salad bowl, [posed] as Melpomene the Tragic muse. Second, ditto in ditto, ditto, ditto, with backgammon board under the left arm as Clio, Muse of History. Small fat brother, upon one leg, in act of flying, with wreath and bow and arrow, complete as God of love, and Materfamilias in arm-chair with hired peacock, as Juno, Queen of Heaven. ("Photographers," Household Words 16.394, October 10, 1857, p.352, qtd. in Novak 79).

Assuming that the realized photographs of the Illustrations approximate Cameron's imagined version of them, we can see ways in which, though they are not polished or popular successes, the images earnestly express concepts that were important to the photographer, though her literal effort to convey her vision caused the outcome to be less aesthetically pleasing than her earlier photography. Speaking of the flaws in this genre of Cameron’s images, Janet Malcolm wisely notes that it is “[t]hese traces” that “give the photographs their life and charm”:

If Cameron had succeeded in her project of making seamless works of illustrative art, her work would be among the curiosities of Victorian photography – like Henry Peach Robinson’s waxen “Fading Away” and Oscar Gustave Rejlander’s extravagantly awful “The Two Ways of Life” – rather than among its most vital images.”

---

In a final burst of creative energy, Cameron composed her two-volume edition of the *Illustrations* plus the composite and miniature editions in record time. Each volume required intensive handiwork: she took two hundred forty-five photographs to achieve the two dozen that were acceptable to her. The wet collodion process she used required a combination of stamina and dexterity that would have tried the patience of even the most determined amateur under the best of conditions. In addition, the large photographs had to be singly printed and individually mounted, each verse extract handwritten on a stone to be lithographed. Every individual copy of the book was a unique piece of art.

Volumes One and Two of the *Illustrations* are bound in maroon half-morocco stamped in gold. Many copies bear the artisan’s imprint: “Bound by T. Freeman, Oxford” on the inside cover (Millard 195-197). Though every photo is mounted on blue board decorated with a gold line about one-half inch from the margin, the images themselves are not uniform in size, nor are they exactly alike in each volume. Each of the books opens with a title page followed by a dedication to the Princess Royal, after which appears an ode to Cameron written by Tennyson’s cousin, Charles Turner (Tennyson) lithographed, followed by a frontispiece portrait of the poet, and then lithographed excerpts from the poems on the verso facing each of twelve illustrations on the recto.71

Cameron undertook publication of the *Illustrations* at her own expense through Tennyson’s publisher, Henry S. King. She had previously been disappointed by the poor response she had received from the same publisher concerning the photographs she had submitted to him as frontispieces for the twelve-volume Cabinet Edition of the poet’s work. Only three photos had been chosen for this series: a portrait of Arthur (fig. 28) which appears in the sixth volume of the Cabinet Edition, the seventh volume has the engraved copy of the photo of Elaine with Lancelot’s shield (fig. 16), and volume nine opens with the

---

71 For copies of all the photos and lithographs of the *Illustrations*, see Chapter Six.
image of Maud (fig. 56), the last photograph of the Illustrations. Cameron was distressed that the quality and impact of her photographs was altered by their having been turned into small engravings for this edition. This diminution of her work apparently served as additional motivation for her to bring out her own edition.

On December 4, 1874 Cameron wrote to Sir Edwin Ryan expressing her dissatisfaction and Tennyson’s encouragement:

Alfred Tennyson asked me to illustrate his Idylls for this people’s edition and when I had achieved my beautiful large pictures at such a cost of labour, strength & money, for I have taken 245 photographs to get these 12 successes, it seemed such a pity that they should only appear in the very tiny reduced form in Alfred’s volume (where I gave them only as a matter of friendship), that he himself said to me “Why don’t you bring them out their actual size in a big volume at your own risk” and I resolved at once to do so.

(unpublished letter in Gilman Paper Co. archives, qtd. in Ford 142)

Henry S. King published the complete set of her Tennysonian illustrations in their original large format in two volumes during the next six months. Since she was footing the bill herself, Cameron had control of the project, and so could insure that the finished books appeared the way she wanted them to.

She did all she could to insure that the sales of the first volume of the Illustrations would be significant, writing to Sir Edwin Ryan asking him to help her plant publication notices in the press, sending complimentary copies to Oxford and to the Bristol Art Society, and appealing to her friend Alick Wedderburn for help with publicity. In spite of her best efforts to secure favorable reviews, the reception of Volume One was lukewarm, and sales
were so poor that she was unable to recoup her initial investment during the Christmas season of 1874.

Undeterred by this, Cameron went ahead and brought forth a second volume during the next five months. That she did so in the face of almost certain economic loss indicates her determination to finish the project that had become so important to her. Volume Two contains nine images of Tennyson’s poems from sources other than the *Idylls*. Cameron’s artistic decisions in Volume Two are more radical and telling than those of the first volume. She interrupted her Arthurian sequence with a series of eight extra photographs at the start of Volume Two, after which the text returned to the Arthuriad, completing the *Idylls* sequence with clumsy death scenes of Elaine and Arthur. The second volume ends in a grand finale with the last imported image – the sensuous profile of Mary Hillier, her figure enveloped in passion flowers as she plays Maud, the passion flower at the gate, her eye brimming over with tears (fig.56). Other photographically illustrated versions of Tennyson’s poetry from this period use still-life and landscape shots, rather than scenes acted by models, a method of illustration that was much less demanding of a photographer. Cameron’s *Illustrations* are unique.

The gaps, interruptions, inconsistencies, and flaws in Cameron’s *Illustrations* encourage the viewer to fill the spaces and harmonize the inconsistencies, creating a reading individual to each person. By inviting such misprision, the images make the viewer a co-creator of the text, encouraging a collaborative involvement. Tennyson’s poems are re-envisioned, presented as new texts through the new photographic medium. *Between the Acts* similarly contains ellipses, lacunae, and interruptions. Each of these texts offers spaces in which the reader can take part in creating and ultimately performing its meaning.\(^{72}\)

Woolf’s ownership of the Hogarth press and Cameron’s self-publication of her Illustrations insured that both women had the luxury of seeing their work realized exactly as they had imagined it.

We can only guess at why Cameron included the eight extra photographs in the second volume of the Illustrations. The lengthy photographic processes she undertook, requiring many hours of work performed within the confines of her glass house and coal bunker, with the aid of cans of cold water hand-pumped from the family’s well, certainly imposed severe limitations on her craft, as did the time and money pressures under which she was working, indicating that the inclusion of the extra photographs was a deliberate choice. The decision could have been based on formal considerations – on her desire to balance both volumes with an equal dozen photos, matching the Laureate’s dozen primary Idylls, which offered her the opportunity to choose her favorite “outside” or exogenous poems to illustrate. The second dozen can be read as a gloss on or response to the first.

In a footnote to literary history, proving that Arthur was a popular theatrical subject for the Victorians, is the successful production of King Arthur, the play. Twenty years after Cameron published her Illustrations, Tennyson was approached to write a blank verse play based on the Idylls. He declined. In his stead, King Arthur was authored by J. Comyns Carr and directed by Henry Irving, who starred as the male lead. It premiered at the Lyceum Theatre in 1895, with Ellen Terry playing against Irving as Guinevere. Edward Burne-Jones designed the costumes. The cast was replete with maidens draped in white gauze, perhaps influenced by Tennyson’s famous description of the Lady of the Lake, “clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.” Sir Arthur Sullivan composed the music for the play, which ran for one hundred five performances.

The fourth and fifth chapters of this project are dedicated to a close reading of individual photographs in the *Illustrations*. The next chapter looks at Cameron's numerous connections with her niece, Virginia Woolf, and analyzes how she influenced Woolf's writing.
Chapter Two

Virginia Woolf and Julia Margaret Cameron

Cameron's photographs gradually began to fade from the public eye after her departure for Ceylon in 1875. Photographic technology became more universally accessible to amateur photographers, and tastes changed. Photography had not yet achieved the artistic status that Cameron had hoped it would. Her signature style and technique had evolved during a brief moment in history, the result of a convergence of forces. Her soft-focus photos were the product of her vision, independent spirit, and the particular equipment available to her at that period, including her large-format camera, Jamin lens, and glass plate negatives. She had the good fortune to be situated in a temperate, open part of the hemisphere, conducive to photographic processes, and to have an assortment of compliant photogenic subjects readily available to her. Early twentieth-century art photography did not favor Pre-Raphaelite or any other kind of photographic literary illustration; even Cameron's soft focus "big head" images were neglected by the end of the nineteenth century, in favor of more sharply focused portraits.

---

73 As Julian Cox suggests, due to the length of her Jamin lens, sharp focus would have been difficult if not impossible for Cameron to achieve (2006, 41-81). It was a lucky accident which she explored fully. Lewis Carroll did not agree: "Hers are all taken purposely out of focus - some are very picturesque, some merely hideous - however, she talks of them as if they were triumphs of art."

74 An outstanding exception to the unpopularity of literary photographic illustration is the witty and unique art of Mme. Yevonde, a contemporary of Woolf's, who made a collection of artistic "Goddess" portraits of socially prominent women posing as modern versions of classical figures, such as Minerva, Penthisilea, and Niobe (www.madameyevonde.com).
This trend changed in the 1920’s, when Alfred Stieglitz recognized her as a proto-pictorialist, and gave Cameron’s images renewed visibility by publishing her photographs in his journal *Camera Work*. Displaying her photos alongside the work of contemporary photographers emphasized how abstract forms were integrated in her images with concrete representations of actuality. Abigail Solomon Godeau suggests that Steiglitz’s aggregate grouping provided a way for modernist photographers to establish their work as a recognized art form, giving it a heritage and tracing its historical lineage back to its beginnings in the nineteenth century (110). In 1926, the Hogarth Press published two dozen of Cameron’s photos, mostly portraits. *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*, edited by Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry, is a collection of Woolf’s twelve favorite Cameron images accompanied by Fry and Woolf’s essays. It was republished in an expanded edition in 1973. In 1948, Helmut Gernsheim’s monograph, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, gave her signature soft-focus photographs an additional boost. Cameron’s images have grown in popularity ever since.

Due to the advent of roll film in 1883 and other advances in photographic materials that made its practice widely accessible, photography lost its cachet as a specialty available to few. Soon amateur photography became a popular hobby, available to everybody for a small sum. Kodak issued the first Brownie camera in 1910; sold for a dollar. As Linda Nochlin suggests in her important essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” certain previously overlooked art forms have been identified as the province of women: amateur photography in the twentieth century is an example; it was women who traditionally put together collections of candid photographs. The family photo album has

---

75 The 2nd edition of *Victorian Photographs* contains twice as many images and an added essay-commentary by Tristram Powell, its editor.

76 *Art News* 69, no. 9 (January 1971): 22-39
since been recuperated and featured as an everyday form of women’s art, as has the patchwork quilt.

Cameron’s grandnieces Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell owned cameras from adolescence on. They developed their own photographs, arranging them in several family albums. The Stephen sisters’ private album (labeled the first Monk’s House album by Maggie Humm) opens with proper Victorian cartes de visite and family portraits, including one of Cameron, and progresses through the decade of the 1930’s to the time of Woolf’s death. The album includes several nudes of the men of Bloomsbury, and a couple of Vanessa and Molly MacCarthy: going farther than their great aunt, Woolf and her sister turned their camera’s gaze onto male sitters, as had Cameron, but they did not stop at head shots. The Stephen sisters’ “Bloomsbury” album collection ends with the portraits of Vanessa and Angelica Bell posed in a set of Cameron-inflected robed scenes that were made in 1941 as guides for the murals at Saint Michael and All Angels Church (Humm 2006, 183-4).

Their great aunt’s work gave Vanessa and Virginia a visual anchor for their own creativity, as an inspiration and as a background against which they could react. Maggie Humm suggests that the sisters used photography as a way of constructing their autobiographies, as prosthetic device for aiding memory, and as a way of identifying and placing themselves in their family’s intellectual and artistic lineage. Cameron’s photographs were available to help them accomplish these functions.

Their immediate family’s influence on Virginia and Vanessa was mixed, however. Both parents simultaneously enabled and constrained the sisters’ creativity. Woolf wrote that her mother, Julia Stephen, had “haunted me, but then so did that old wretch my father” (L3: 374). Though Woolf’s complex relationship with her parents was difficult and exacting,

---

77 Maggie Humm’s Snapshots of Bloomsbury: the Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell (London: Tate Press, 2006) contains a catalog and several reproductions of these photos.
the struggle to comprehend and negotiate their influence yielded rich artistic rewards. The
Stephen sisters’ three aunts inspired their nieces’ independence and supported their
creativity through example, vision, and material gifts. Though a vexed influence, Woolf’s
family ultimately nourished her writing, giving her material for her fiction and a critical lens
through which to see it.

Family Ties

Cameron in Woolf’s Memoirs:
“A Sketch of the Past” and “Reminiscences”

At the end of her career Woolf, like Cameron, wrote a brief autobiographical
fragment of ninety-five pages, which, together with her previously written memoirs,
comprises her life writing. She began the last section of her memoirs in April 1939, while
writing Between the Acts and Anon. The document opens with her earliest childhood
memories and then skips back a generation to her mother’s youth at the salons that
Cameron and her sister Sara Prinsep held at Little Holland House in Kensington in the
1840’s. It was there that her mother received the form of instruction Woolf describes as
Julia Jackson’s “training for life” – for “Little Holland House was her world then [,]”
“presided over” – as Woolf visualizes the Pattles – “by some of the six lovely sisters; who do

78 Redacted from holograph and typescript drafts, it has been published with Woolf’s earlier written memoirs as
a section of Moments of Being (64-159).
not wear crinolines, but are robed in splendid Venetian draperies; they sit enthroned, and talk with foreign emphatic gestures” (MOB 86-7).79

Little Holland House then was her education. She was taught there to take such part as girls did then in the lives of distinguished men; to pour out tea; to hand them their strawberries and cream; to listen devoutly, reverently to their wisdom; to accept the fact that Watts was the great painter; Tennyson the great poet; and to dance with the Prince of Wales. (MOB 88)

Not only was Woolf’s life shaped by the inheritance of Pattle modes and manners, but as a grandniece, she was aware of the Pattle blood flowing in her veins.

Creating a new form for her autobiography, Woolf integrated the present moment with the past, observing that she was surveying her life from “the little platform of present time on which I stand” (MOB 85). This method of present-moment surveillance with a mixed serious and ironic tone is characteristic of Woolf’s lifelong attempt as a writer to find a form in which to express herself and a place from which to do so. She was grateful for her outsider position as a woman because it situated her at the edge of society, thus giving her a vantage point from which to form her critique of it from a fresh perspective. In Tennyson’s poem *The Princess*, the protagonist, a poetic forbear of Woolf’s, looks for an Archimedean “Pou Sto,” or place on which to stand to move the world. Woolf fashioned one for herself in words and ideas.

Throughout her life Woolf struggled to free herself of what she termed the Victorian “rules of the game” that she had been raised with, simultaneously acknowledging the value

---

79 Either Woolf mistakenly remembered the number of her great aunts, or excluded Cameron from among her seven "lovely" sisters, envisioning her as the one who looks at the others from behind the camera with her photographer’s eye.
of the sympathy, restraint, and unselfishness that underlay them. She wrote of the divide that separated Vanessa and herself from their parents, especially Leslie Stephen, from earliest childhood:

Two different ages confronted each other in the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate. The Victorian age and the Edwardian age. We were not his children; we were his grandchildren [...]. But while we looked into the future, we were completely under the power of the past. Explorers and revolutionists, as we both were by nature, we lived under the sway of a society that was about fifty years too old for us [...]. For the society in which we lived was still the Victorian society [...]. We were living say in 1910; they were living in 1860 [...]. We both learnt the rules of the game of Victorian society so thoroughly that we have never forgotten them. We still play the game. It is useful. It has also its beauty, for it is founded upon restraint, sympathy, unselfishness – all civilized qualities. It is helpful in making something seemly out of raw odds and ends. (MOB 147, 150)

Woolf called this Victorian game of manners her “tea-table training,” observing how she and Vanessa were caught very young by “the machine into which our rebellious bodies were inserted in 1900 [which] not only held us tight in its framework, but bit into us with innumerable sharp teeth” (MOB 152). She saw her brother similarly “stamped and moulded by that great patriarchal machine” (MOB 153), becoming a proper gentleman who believed in society with a belief that had “depth, swiftness, inevitability” (MOB 153). Her mother, Julia Stephen, who presided over the tea table, served as her children’s chief tutor in this social education.

Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth Stephen

Woolf’s beautiful mother was one of Cameron’s favorite models. Her repressive maternal guidance played a role in Woolf’s authorial formation. As a couple, Julia and Leslie
Stephen closely conformed to a Victorian ideal of marriage. They acted out the male and female parts designated by the title of Woolf’s *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*: he was illustrious, she was beautiful. Julia Jackson Stephen was the sort of ideal wife Tennyson described in *The Princess*, in one of the few passages from Tennyson’s poetry that Woolf copied into her reading notes:80

Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
Interpreter between the Gods and men,
Who looked all native to her place, and yet
On tiptoe seemed to touch upon a sphere
Too gross to tread […]

(Ricks 2: 291-2, ll.299-303)

Cameron’s profile portrait of Julia Stephen conveys her singular loveliness as well as her strength, indicating the reasons she was revered for her beauty and angelic goodness (fig. 73). Like Cameron’s Enid in the *Illustrations*, Julia Stephen was associated with classically beautiful and saintly women. Edward Burne-Jones used her as his model for the Virgin Mary in his painting “The Annunciation” in 1879, and Woolf patterned the selfless character of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* on her. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf’s mother “had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died” (TTL 203). A friend of Coventry Patmore, Julia Jackson

Stephen was the embodiment of the ideal Victorian woman, the subject of “The Angel in the House.”

In the novel, Mrs. Ramsay becomes subsumed by the lighthouse beam at which she gazes. The camera, telescope, and searchlight – the other three of the four visual technologies that Woolf uses in her fiction — help to extend the sight and reveal things otherwise hidden to the eye of the reader. The searchlight and lighthouse beam, both designed to warn and protect by extending a beam of light through the darkness, serve an opposite purpose. The eponymous searchlight is used in Woolf’s writing as a metaphor for insight and illumination, as shown in her late story “The Searchlight.” But this is not the case with the lighthouse beam, created to warn sailors. In To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay possesses an unknowable, unreachable darkened interior. The lighthouse illuminates her as she is absorbed by its sweeping beam in the novel, just as Cameron’s lens caught Julia Stephen’s image on a glass plate, suggesting depths but unable to express them. Woolf implies that Mrs. Ramsay’s inner self has been closed off by the roles she played as wife and mother, which imposed their identity on her from without. She is referred to in the novel by her husband’s patronymic; she has no personal forename to distinguish her. Tellingly, Woolf chose to caption her mother’s portraits (Plates 15, 16, & 19 in Victorian Photographs) using the surnames of both of her husbands -- “Mrs. Leslie Stephen: (Mrs. Herbert Duckworth)” -- rather than “JPS” for “Julia Prinsep Stephen,” which is how she is identified as author of the Cameron entry in the Dictionary of National Biography.

In Three Guineas, Woolf argues for a life for women spacious enough to allow self-definition, rather than submission to the constraints imposed by the definition of others. Tennyson’s Lilia in The Princess raises similar issues of definition. Woolf saw her mother as a prisoner in the “shadow of the private house” (TG 22), an example of a woman who was complicit in and subject to her role.
Woolf famously describes how she had to do battle with the Angel in the House’s pernicious effects on her creativity in order to be able to write. The description appears in a section of *The Pargiters* (60), in a passage which constitutes a key part of her lecture “Professions for Women.” Her battle with the Angel culminates in a violent matricidal metaphor as Woolf tells how “it was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.” The stakes are high; Woolf wrestles with the Angel to win the freedom to write:

[… she slipped behind me and whispered: ‘My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.’ For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must – to put it bluntly – tell lies if they are to succeed. (60)

The process of cultivating charm through dissembling was part of the “tea-table training” young women received in their homes, which Woolf saw as a root cause of gender inequality and exploitation (MOB 150). Through this early training Woolf learned the script for one of the many roles she would play in her life. Later, she learned how to evaluate all scripts keenly, to discard some and flexibly change from one role to another.

**The Power of "Auntliness":**

**Caroline Stephen, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, and Julia Margaret Cameron**

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf famously suggests that “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (76). The process of thinking back through her own mother, in
her aspect as the Angel in the House, had nearly suffocated Woolf's writing. Julia Stephen was no supporter of equal rights for women and actually opposed universal suffrage, ceding her right to vote to her husband who she felt could speak for her. She was a complex mixture of nurturance and restriction: her tender devotion to her husband and family enriched and protected their lives, while her induction of her daughters into circumscribed, "womanly" roles restricted their development.

Julia Stephen was also an author: in addition to her voluminous correspondence and the entry for Cameron in her husband’s first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* mentioned above, she published an instruction manual for the care of the sick at home, *Notes from Sick Rooms*, and a collection of stories for children.

Unable to squeeze her writing into the narrow categories established by her mother, Woolf burst through the boundaries society laid out for her and chose instead to think back through other "foremothers" notably her three aunts. These aunts were of great importance to Woolf's life, though they are not as well known as the great men of their generation. They were inspiring, independent, and creative women who served as muses for Woolf, each in her own way, forming a triumvirate -- there is no female equivalent of the word -- a trio of powerful auntliness. As Virginia Blain notes, "(w)omen writers find it helpful to negotiate their relationship with the past by adopting an aunt-figure, for an aunt is positioned outside the linear progression of the patriarchal family and can offer subversive and alternative views of family history" (223).

Women have often played invisible roles in history, as demonstrated by the absence in the English language of an adequate lexical female counterpart for "avuncular" to describe a paternal aunt. The adjective for a maternal aunt is "materteral," an awkward and

---

little-known portmanteau word. Through their spirited “auntliness,” Caroline Stephen, Anne (whom Cameron called “Anny”) Thackeray Ritchie, and Julia Margaret Cameron shaped and enabled their niece’s writing career.

It was by the generosity of her father’s sister, Caroline Emilia Stephen, the Quaker aunt who left her L2500, that Woolf was able to support her writing and afford the famous room of her own in which to write. Caroline Stephen, herself an established author in the Quaker press, did much to encourage her niece by example and praise. Woolf felt gratitude to her maiden Aunt Caroline for her support and admired the toughness of “the Quaker,” as Woolf called her. Though at times she disagreed with her aunt’s “system of woolly benignity,” she felt her to be “a very wise and witty old lady” (Platform 50). Her aunt’s house in Cambridge, “the Porch,” served as a sanctuary for Woolf in 1904, when she lived with Aunt Caroline while recovering from the breakdown that followed her father’s death. Though they were not close, her aunt’s legacy deeply and famously influenced Woolf’s feminism and writing career.

Anny Thackeray Ritchie, the daughter of William Thackeray and sister of Leslie Stephen’s first wife Minnie Thackeray, had ties to Freshwater from childhood. As author and friend to both Cameron and Woolf, Anny bridged three generations in her life and writing. When Leslie Stephen became a widower at Minnie’s death, Anny Thackeray remained close to the Stephen family, helping Leslie to raise his seven children. Aunt Anny’s optimism and resilience made her an appealing and amiable friend. In their youth, the Thackeray sisters knew the Camerons well through summers spent in West Wight. They stayed at Dimbola as

---

82 William Safire, in “On Language,” though apparently unfamiliar with “materteral,” was struck by the lack of an adjective for auntliness and asked his readers for suggestions. Published replies include “auntique,” “tantular” and “tantative.” One reader noted that the Latin word “amita,” one’s father’s sister, wasn’t the root of any English word and so Safire settled on “amital” to describe a paternal aunt.

83 Aunt Caroline Stephen wrote devotional works with titles like Quaker Strongholds and Light Arising: Thoughts on the Central Radiance. Woolf owned several of her aunt’s volumes.
guests of Cameron’s after their father’s death. Years later, Anny returned to the Isle of Wight to purchase one of the Camerons’ cottages, also coincidentally named “the Porch,” where Anny lived till her death in 1919, writing several books about Freshwater life on location. Aunt Anny taught Woolf much that she did not know about the Camerons, Tennyson, and life in Freshwater Bay, memorializing the community life in her novels and memoir, From the Porch. She was a kindred spirit of Woolf’s, according to Carol Hanbery Mackay, for “[i]n Anny, Virginia found someone who could join in friendly combat with her father” (70).

Neither Aunt Caroline nor Anny got along especially well with Leslie Stephen, though they both made sincere efforts to console him after Minnie’s, and later Julia’s, deaths. Freshwater also called Woolf’s older stepbrother Gerald Duckworth back at the end of his life. He, too, spent his last days at “the Porch,” where he passed away in 1937.

Julia Stephen supplied her daughter with her impressions of Cameron, recorded by Woolf in “Reminiscences” and “A Sketch of the Past”, but Anny filled in the greater number of details and conveyed the flavor of nineteenth-century life in West Wight for her. In “The Enchanted Organ,” her short essay on Ann Thackeray Ritchie, Woolf conveys the vitality and warmth of her aunt, noting poignantly Ritchie’s “profound instinct for happiness” (CE 4:73, 75) – a simplicity of character that Woolf, with her exquisite sensibility, may have longed for but did not possess in abundance. In addition to photographing Woolf’s parents, and thus in effect illustrating To the Lighthouse before Woolf was born, Cameron also created an iconic image of Aunt Anny (fig. 75), a formal portrait which Anny used as the frontispiece for her

---

84 Her daughter Hester Thackeray Fuller writes that “The Porch” was “a little cottage which, when built by Mrs. Cameron, stood in the fields. It was christened ‘The Porch’ by Mrs. Cameron after the celebrated Athenian Porch where Socrates and Plato held forth to admiring crowds. Jowett was at this time translating Plato, and Mrs. Cameron built ‘The Porch’ for him, in which to work and stay” (38).

books. With its sharp focus and fine definition, it is a somewhat anomalous photograph in Cameron’s work. In it we see Anny as if through her own clear temperament, which Woolf called “so buoyant and so keen” that through its agency “the gloom of that famous [Victorian] age dissolves in an iridescent mist which lifts entirely to display radiant prospects of glittering spring” (CE 4: 73). The photograph is marked by its lightness: there are no shadows, and Anny’s dress looks bridal; it is decorated with ruffles, embroidered lace, pearls, and flowers are pinned at the bosom. She looks off in the distance as if she were listening to strains of music that only she can hear. With her optimism and high spirits, Anny regularly burst through proper Victorian boundaries. She incurred the family’s disapproval by marrying her second cousin Richmond Ritchie in 1877. Seventeen years younger than she, he had not begun his education at Cambridge when they wed.

Her extensive appearance in Woolf’s writing suggests that the strongest “materteral” influence of all came from her great aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, whom she knew only second hand, having been born three years after Cameron’s death. Woolf’s appreciation of her great aunt Julia, begun in amusement at her eccentric behavior and inspired by a robust appreciation for her work, reached its peak in the last three years of Woolf’s life. Cameron apparently influenced both the character of the playwright La Trobe in Between the Acts and Anon, the performance poet in Woolf’s unfinished literary survey, Reading at Random.

All three of her aunts helped to strengthen Woolf’s independent thought and foster her writing career. Aunt Caroline’s monetary help secured the room in which Woolf began to write, her own “studio” – an analogue to the hen house and coal bunker of Cameron’s work spaces. Aunt Anny supplied Woolf with a taste of the savory essence of life in West Wight in the 1860’s. Through Anny Ritchie’s eyes Woolf saw Freshwater as a magical and

---

86 Cameron’s photograph of Leslie Stephen is in the archives of the Smith College Library and available for viewing online at: http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/rarebook/exhibitions/stephen/25.htm
radiant, as well as humorous, place. Cameron, in her life as an artist as well as in her photographs – especially the literary tableaux – influenced Woolf to imagine Miss La Trobe, the most complete and successful woman artist in her fiction, and helped inspire her to move her creative venue from a room of her own to the salvific interactions of the community theatre.

Connections to Cameron show up throughout Woolf’s writing. In 1864 Cameron created a photographic tableau she called “The Three Marys,” featuring three young women dressed as the biblical Marys – the women who discovered the empty tomb the day after the resurrection. In a rare instance of verbal playfulness, Cameron chose three local Freshwater models whose Christian forenames were “Mary” so that the title of her photograph refers simultaneously to her models and the scriptural women, (Cox 2003 134, cat. no. 119).

Decades later, in A Room of One’s Own, Woolf makes mention of her own serious version of the “three Marys”: Mary Beton, Mary Seton, and Mary Carmichael. References to them are woven throughout the text (pages 5, 18, 20, 21, 22, 37, 44, 45, 80, 81, 84, 88, 89, 90, 94, & 105); their dialogue helps organize the book and presents its major ideas. Like Cameron’s Marys, Woolf’s have a literary referent, though hers is doubled: the primary, scriptural Marys and the three Marys of “The Ballad of the Queen’s Marys,” who were Mary Queen of Scots’ attendants. Woolf might have come across the ballad in reading Sir Walter Scott’s Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border in her father’s library.

Leslie Stephen and Tennyson’s Legacy

Virginia Woolf’s relationship with her parents constrained, vexed, and ultimately nourished her writing. Throughout her life, her mother’s voice rang in her ears, reinforcing
Victorian standards of propriety; her death enabled Woolf to "suddenly develop perceptions" that enriched her writing, though it was her father's passing that finally granted her artistic freedom (MOB 93). Woolf observed that her mother "has haunted me, but then so did that old wretch my father" (L3: 374). Both her parents knew Cameron – especially her mother – and had their portrait taken by her.

Along with Cameron, Tennyson figured more importantly in Woolf's writing than is commonly acknowledged, though he is addressed less directly than she. Julia and Leslie Stephen knew Tennyson; they were linked to the Tennysons by many mutual interests and ties, intensified by Dimbola's proximity to Farringford. It was inevitable that the foremost Victorian biographer would be familiar with the Poet Laureate. Woolf dined with Tennyson as a young child, though her relationship with him was inevitably limited by the great difference in their ages. Once asked about the "distinguished people" she had known, Woolf replied that "the astonishing thing is that these great people talked much as you and I talk; Tennyson, for instance, would say to me, 'Pass the salt' or 'Thank you for the butter'" (L1: 300, July 20, 1907).

Leslie Stephen was identified in Woolf's mind with Tennyson. Together, though she resisted much of what they stood for, their influence permeated her writing and her thought. She rebelled against the heavy, instructive, and sometimes lugubrious Victorian aspects of Tennyson's verse, which increasingly reflected his conservatism and loyalty to what she considered to be an outgrown code of chivalry as he became older, while at the same time she was attracted by its sensuousness, elegance, and sensitivity. The intense emotional force of his poetry resonated with her temperamentally.

Surprisingly, Woolf chose "The Charge of the Light Brigade" as the soundtrack of Mr. Ramsay's peregrinations in her novel To the Lighthouse. The poem, an anomalous evocation of militarism and violence into the peaceful Cornwall landscape, is an index to his perplexity
and anguish in response to thoughts of the Crimean war. In 1898 Leslie Stephen had questioned whether Tennyson, in writing Maud, had fallen in “too easily with the curious delusion of the time [...] that the Crimean War implied the moral regeneration of the country,” observing drily that, “I don’t think that the war can now be credited with that effect” (Studies of a Biographer 237). “The Charge of the Light Brigade” through its subtle and anguished reflection quells, or at least complicates, the impression of Tennyson’s possible warmongering.

In the later years of his life and after, the Laureate’s verse was used to arouse support for war: by the 1920’s his reputation had been tarnished by the association of his poetry with a naive encouragement to military service and combat.87 To the Lighthouse is set in 1909, more than a half century after the original publication of Tennyson’s poem, at the point when the tide of public sentiment about war was changing. The novel was written in the mid-1920’s, in the aftermath of World War I. Mr. Ramsay, widely accepted by critics as a figure for Leslie Stephen, is approximately sixty-five in the novel, an age of maturity from which he was able to evaluate the complexity of the past and question received ideals of the chivalric code. However, he is made a tragicomic figure in the novel, charging around reciting poetry ambiguously reflecting the heroism of the past. He repeats the kernel line of the poem -- “someone had blunder’d” -- several times throughout the book. Significantly, Mr. Ramsay’s mantra is the line of the poem about which Tennyson had the most profound ambivalence.

Though she illustrated the chivalric Arthurian legends in the Illustrations, Cameron would have had difficulty making photographs of “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” She did not choose to portray scenes of combat; the problems involved in staging the military battle

---

87 In the critical heritage relating to Tennyson’s poetry, there are several expressions of this sentiment. Fausset’s explication of the use of Tennyson’s verse for recruitment posters and other military endeavors – such as in the 1859 poem “Riflemen, form!” a call for volunteers – is among the most clearly formulated. (Hugh l’Anson Fausset’s Tennyson: A Modern Portrait. NY: Russell & Russell, 1929) 219 ff.
chronicled by “The Charge of the Light Brigade” would have been prodigious. A set of photograph of the Valley of Balaclava and battle site had been made previously by Roger Fenton, on his trip to Russia in 1855, a year after the battle (fig. 76). Fenton’s photos offered the Victorian imagination a way to visualize the poem and the battle.88

“The Charge of the Light Brigade” simultaneously honors and deplores the British cavalry’s obedient and virtually defenseless ride through the Crimean valley as evidence of an outgrown remnant of chivalry. The poem evokes the concept of valor in battle that underlies Tennyson’s Idylls of the King, the story of Arthur, the embodiment of Victorian chivalry.

“The Charge of the Light Brigade”

A conservative way of thinking, chivalry had begun to prove an inadequate solution to the military and political problems of the nineteenth century in England, leading to distressing losses and unsatisfactory outcomes. The Battle of Balaclava is often cited as the beginning of modern warfare, a military encounter during which cutting-edge technology was employed on a battlefield side by side with age-old techniques of warfare. The Crimean War was the first conflict in which embedded newspaper journalists telegraphed reports from the battlefront – in fact, “The Charge of the Light Brigade” is the first canonical poem to have originated in a telegram.

Tennyson had been deeply moved by newspaper accounts of the battle, which described how the British cavalry at Balaclava, armed with swords, charged the length of the “Valley of Death” between two hills lined with Russian cannons and rifles. The reporter William Howard Russell had written an editorial for the November 13, 1854 issue of The

88 Jennifer Green-Lewis, in her chapter on Roger Fenton and the Crimea, argues that photography not only revealed places to Britons, but also controlled their representation in the British imagination.
London Times in which he described how "[t]hey swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendor of war. We could scarcely believe the evidence of our senses! Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position?" They did, and their numbers were decimated by enemy fire. Tennyson responded to the newspaper report of the battle by writing what may very likely be his best known and most recited poem.

According to Hallam Tennyson, less than three weeks after reading the description of the battle, his father sat down and wrote the poem “in a few minutes.” The author of the Times editorial had used the phrase “some hideous blunder” to describe the order to charge that was given to the hapless cavalry, a line which Tennyson remembered as “[s]omeone had blundered.” The misquotation stuck in the poet’s mind and soon became “the origin of the metre of his poem” (Memoir I: 381), composed of dactyls that seem to gallop off the page. Worried about the poem’s effect, Tennyson published a revision the following year, omitting lines 5-12, which include the crucial “Someone had blundered” as well as the equally well known, “Theirs not to reason why/Theirs but to do and die” (Ricks 2:510-511).

As Poet Laureate and troubadour for the nation, he was eager to send out a message to all Britons. Tennyson gained additional motivation to put the news report into verse, according to his son, when he learned that the ancient Bretons, struck with an epidemic of cholera, “[...]would not listen to their doctors until they put their advice in song [...]” (Memoir I:381). He felt compelled to spread word of both the glory and the gore of the Battle of Balaclava. The poem was wildly popular, though its message was subtly ambiguous. Regretting his 1855 removal of the eight lines, in the following year he republished the poem in another edition, restored to its original form, with uneasiness that the reinstated lines might demonstrate an unpatriotic lack of support and thus undermine
the morale of the troops. It is this line of poetry that Mr. Ramsay is most identified with, calling into question his attitude toward his chivalric Victorian inheritance.

The word “cavalry” evolved from the French word for horse, “cheval” – also the root word of chivalry. The cavalry in the Battle of Balaclava demonstrated the chivalry which had permeated British culture as part of the national character so deeply and for so long that its inheritance was taken for granted. Tennyson’s audience was vast. The poem spread across the world, attractive in its musical prosody: “The Charge of the Light Brigade” contains dactylys that mimic the galloping cavalry, which makes it especially easy to commit to memory and pleasurable to recite.

Five times in Woolf’s novel To the Lighthouse Mr. Ramsay recites the line “someone had blunder’d,” until it becomes his mantra (TTL 33, 44, 51, 52, 55). Each recitation is performed in a slightly different way: one time he repeats it “tragic with defiant intensity” (Ibid 44); another, “fierce as a hawk at the head of his men through the valley of death...” (Ibid 52); and finally, he recites it “almost as a question, without any conviction, melodiously” (Ibid 55). Twice, Mr. Ramsay declaims another line from the poem, “Stormed at with shot and shell” (Ibid 17, 30); the implied rhyme to “shot and shell” -- “the jaws of Hell” -- remains unstated. He utters these words with an “outraged and anguished” cry (Ibid 31). His character, in its range of moods, seems permeated with Tennyson’s ambivalence about the chivalric charge. Mr. Ramsay declaims other poets’ lines also – but “someone had blunder’d” from “The Charge of the Light Brigade” appears most often and with particular urgency throughout Part I of the novel. Perhaps that is because Tennyson’s attitudes toward life resonated with those held by Woolf’s father.

Leslie Stephen observed that Tennyson had not

---

89 Another connection with chivalry germane to this project is the title of Cameron’s grandfather, the Chevalier de L’Etang, a page to Louis XVI of France, and later in charge of the Royal Stud at Pondicherry.
faced doubts boldly and attained convictions of one kind or other [but instead] always seemed to [him] to be like a man clinging to a spar left floating after a shipwreck, knowing that it will not support him, and yet never able to make up his mind to strike out and take his chance of sinking or swimming [...] it is not the attitude of the poet who can give a war-cry to his followers, or of the philosopher who really dares to chase the specters of the mind. (Studies of a Biographer 239-40)

Stephen himself was described by Woolf as clinging and demanding, a dependent man not any more likely than the poet to give a brave war-cry to his followers.

Leslie Stephen criticized Tennyson's indecision, yet as a poet he considered him to be one of “the mighty of the earth...the great hero of the day” (Ibid 217). Aware of her father's checkered estimation of the Laureate, Woolf may have made Mr. Ramsay resemble Stephen's Tennyson, as a man not expressing a consistent response to the Battle of Balaclava, but inhabiting a range of opinions concerning war. As for chasing "the specters of the mind," Tennyson possessed sufficient inner strength and authorial courage to confront disintegration, madness, and death in poems such as Maud, and had risked negative response from his critics time after time. Woolf also took artistic risks and chased the specters of the mind in her experimental fiction, especially The Waves, Mrs. Dalloway, and Between the Acts. To the Lighthouse appears to be her negotiation with a father whom she identified with Tennyson – suggesting that making peace with the poet was part of regaining her equilibrium after her father's death.

As a young girl, Woolf read through her father’s library without any restrictions, at his invitation. She learned to associate her father's voice with the voices of celebrated male
poets. Every evening Leslie Stephen read aloud to his children for an hour and a half in the
drawing room of 22 Hyde Park Gate. Woolf describes this ritual in the essay she wrote for
F.W. Maitland's book on Stephen: “[h]e began too to read poetry rather than prose on
Sunday nights and the Sunday poetry went on to the very end after the nightly readings had
been given up” He “[c]hanted the poets” and knew “all the most famous poems” of
Tennyson's. Leslie Stephen's recitations were theatrical performances put on for his
daughters – performances that Woolf both cherished and resisted:

He very much disliked reading poems from a book, and if he could
not speak from memory he generally refused to recite at all. His recitation,
or whatever it may be called, gained immensely from this fact, for as he lay
back in his chair and spoke the beautiful words with closed eyes, we felt that
he was speaking not merely the words of Tennyson or Wordsworth but
what he himself felt and knew. Thus many of the great English poems now
seem to me inseparable from my father; I hear in them not only his voice,
but in some sort his teaching and belief. (475)

Woolf only rarely quotes Tennyson directly in her writing, giving attribution to his
poetry, and mostly omits mentioning him when she knits his words into her prose, as
expressions of her “teaching and belief.” The influence of the Laureate’s voice can be heard
throughout her writing in its cadences, melodies, and rich word choice -- sometimes there
are direct quotations, as in this sentence from *Three Guineas* concerning the war that echoes
the anguished cry from *In Memoriam*: “As we listen to the voices we seem to hear an infant
crying in the night, the black night that now covers Europe, and with no language but a cry,
Ay, ay, ay, ay” (TG 215). In her essay “Money and Love,” two lines from “The Lord Burleigh”

---

Impressions” 1906, which is Woolf's short memoir at the opening of the last chapter of Maitland's book (474-6).

91 Two vividly memorable exceptions to this observation are the “There has fallen a splendid tear/ from the
passion flower at the gate” passage from *Maud* that she contrasts with Christina Rossetti’s verse “My heart is like
a singing bird” in *A Room of One's Own* (2005, 12) and the profuse use of quotes to characterize Tennyson in
*Freshwater* -- including “the moan of doves in immemorial elms/ And murmuring of innumerable bees” (68),
and “the mellow ouzel fluting on the lawn” (16) – which are described (by the Laureate himself) as the most
beautiful lines of poetry ever written – with which Woolf may have been in agreement.
(CE 3: 186) appear, slightly misquoted. Yet Woolf’s officially expressed opinion of Tennyson’s verse was equivocal:

Tennyson is of course the master of those Victorian poets who carried descriptive writing to such a pitch that if their words had been visible the blackbirds would certainly have descended upon their garden plots to feed upon the apples and the plums. Yet we do not feel that this is poetry so much as something fabricated for our delight.\(^{92}\)

In her memoir “A Sketch of the Past” Woolf observes that “it seem[ed] natural to quote Tennyson” when describing her parents’ scripted Victorian lives (MOB 90). Leslie Stephen’s voice, inflected in her mind by Tennyson’s, had circumscribed his daughter’s life, fueling her need to rebel. For most of Woolf’s youth Leslie Stephen was at work on the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As its first editor, he broke new ground in recording the life stories of the nation’s great leaders. The job, which began in 1882, the same year that Woolf was born, was demanding and absorbed much of his time and energy. His devotion to the dictionary evokes Cameron’s attitude toward her work after ten years, incarnating it as a child, lisping and stammering. Stephen’s children were taught an enormous respect for his project, but its drain on his attention engendered in them a sense of competition. Woolf’s apparent reluctance to praise Tennyson’s epic Arthurians may have resulted in part from her modernist objections to the cult of great men, to which she had been exposed by her father. *The Dictionary of National Biography* comprised multiple volumes chronicling the lives of its mostly male subjects. Woolf read her father’s work along with Carlyle’s *On

\(^{92}\) “Patmore’s Criticism” in *Books and Portraits* 37. Italics mine.
Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in Our Time, which caused her to have the character Ralph Denham express such strong criticism in Night and Day: “I hate great men. The worship of greatness in the nineteenth century seems to me to explain the worthlessness of that generation” (ND 15).

Leslie Stephen both enabled his daughter’s writing through his encouragement and free access to his library, and disabled it through his sometimes harshly controlling dependencies and his inexorable neediness after the death of his wife. He was a stern figure from another age whose life shadowed hers. On November 28, 1928 Woolf famously wrote in her diary:

Father’s birthday. He would have been […] 96, yes, today; & could have been 96 like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; -- inconceivable. I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing The Lighthouse, laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true – that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.) He comes back now more as a contemporary. (D 3:208)

Woolf allowed her father to evolve into a peaceful artwork, continuing his life but taming it, through writing To the Lighthouse, which accomplished the work of an elegy. However, her ambivalence toward him remained an active influence in her work to the end of her career, as evidenced in her struggle against the valorization of chivalric heroism and patriarchal hierarchies that permeated English life.
Woolf and Tennyson

On the surface, the gulf between Tennyson and Woolf’s work appears to be very large. They wrote from very different social and political positions. As Laureate, he was the official spokesperson for the nation, supporting the country’s wars, praising royalty, memorializing public events. She, a feminist, celebrated the daily domestic occurrences of the lives of ordinary people, choosing to write biographies of the obscure – to form a common history – especially focusing on little-known women, whom she saw as unsung heroes. A pacifist, she vigorously opposed war.

Woolf rebelled against her Victorian inheritance, including Tennyson’s poetry. She published her writing in the hopes it would awaken the public to existing societal inequalities and support the reform of hierarchical social institutions which she believed were oppressing so many silent segments of society. Tennyson saw the genders to be complementary opposites, able to exist harmoniously through an arrangement like the one Milton had described for Adam and Eve: “he for God only; she for God in him.” His poetry expresses a teleological typology based on belief in what Isobel Armstrong calls “the fixity of human values” (111). The assumption of these constants enabled him to feel confident – with a certain amount of ineradicable Tennysonian doubt – in the existence of a permanent type and extrapolate that belief to the possibility of a nationhood united through universal harmony of feeling. This vision of national consensus implied a necessary coercion and lack of respect for individual differences to Woolf, who preferred the voluntary, dialogic gathering of diverse peoples as an ideal. Reverence for one’s homeland expressed in nationalistic sentiment was also problematic for her, as she conceived of it as an “unreal loyalty” (TG 119), based on arbitrary, divisive boundaries. He was born into an age in which the previously established verities, such as unquestioning belief in church and state had begun to wobble and then crumble, assailed by multiple forces, among them scientific
discoveries and theories, industrialization, and rapid social change. She lived in a post-
Newtonian world founded on relativism, in which belief in absolutes was no longer
comfortably possible or desirable. Woolf constantly critiques the stability of the
“certainties” that Tennyson held as ideal. He approached his subjects with earnestness; she
with a more complex perspective, usually characterized by a certain degree of irony and
sometimes playfulness.

Despite their differences, there are important respects in which Woolf and
Tennyson’s writing is deeply alike. They both experimented with new genres, creating
innovative and hybrid forms of writing (e.g. *Maud, a Monodrama; The Princess, a Medley;
The Waves, a poem-play;* and *The Pargiters, an essay-novel,*). They both wrote from multiple
perspectives, in the personae of numerous characters. Tennyson’s shifts in voice are more
clearly identifiable than Woolf’s. The reader cannot always be sure whose speech or
thoughts s/he is hearing in Woolf’s novels. There is a sort of “third voice” in *Between the
Acts,* for example, a perspective not quite belonging to a character nor emanating from an
omniscient narrator. Both appreciated the potential for power and beauty in language:
Tennyson’s poetry, at least in his early verse, is as rich and sensuous as Woolf’s prose,
which became more closely to approximate poetry as her career progressed. *The Waves* is
an example of this, and so is *Between the Acts.* The poems she wrote for the latter were
collected by Mitchell Leaska and published as an afterward in *Pointz Hall* (557-561). Read
aloud, Tennyson and Woolf’s writing fill the ear with their resonant, suggestive melodies.

Both Tennyson and Woolf wrote about intensely intimate human experience. They
addressed sadness, injustice, illness, and chaos as well as joy and rapture; delicate feelings
as well as potent ones. In their exploration of the whole range of possible emotions, they
faced the darkest depths of human experience without flinching. Neither shied away from
addressing the most extreme and painful parts of life; as Linda Shires suggests, they shared
a "relentless, active exploration of the boundaries of consciousness" (1990, 20). The most profound similarity between Woolf and Tennyson's work lies in the sense of emptiness and dislocation, even fragmentation at the heart of their writing. Tennyson's most intense poems, such as *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, express a deeper fear of disintegration than do the prose descriptions of emptiness and chaos that appear in Woolf's writing. In her diary entries she expresses a dread of making an unbearable discovery of life's essential meaninglessness; in his poetry he slides ineluctably into the dark void, the nothingness that he knows to be at the center of the human heart.

Woolf sought to distance herself from the constraining and potentially overpowering aspects of her Victorian inheritance which she felt she had outgrown. Tennyson's presence, reflected in the darker aspects of her father's somber personality, loomed uncomfortably close, yet though she might have found it oppressive, Woolf never completely relinquished her enjoyment of the beauty of his poetry, as evidenced by its influence on her writing.
“I might spend a lifetime over her”:
Woolf Writes about Cameron and Tennyson

Cameron appears throughout her grandniece’s diaries, letters, essays, plays, memoirs, and fiction. In 1910 Woolf honored Cameron’s connection to the Prince of Abyssinia with the part she played in the *Dreadnought* Hoax, reprising it much later in a lecture she delivered in 1940. Early mention of her great aunt in the drawing room comedy *Freshwater* makes Cameron out to be an eccentric and humorous figure. Woolf’s biographical essay in *Victorian Photographs* presents her as a deeply creative, colorful and impulsive woman. Cameron served as an independent and inspirational artistic “foremother” for Woolf, counteracting the inhibiting influence of her parents. In her later years, with the threat of war looming, Woolf wrote about Cameron in a new way in the evolving drafts of the short story “The Searchlight,” through which she shows the transcendent power of vision and explores the powerful effects of theatrical performance. This chapter ends with a discussion and analysis of “The Searchlight” and the numerous serial drafts that led up to its final version.

Woolf’s research on her great aunt became so engrossing during the writing of her biographical essay on her for *Victorian Photographs* that she observed to her sister Vanessa, “I might spend a lifetime over her” (*Letters* 3: 280, July 1926). Woolf actually did spend a great length of time – over two decades – recurrently thinking and writing about her great aunt, returning to write about her on several occasions until she succeeded in rendering a
complex and profound portrait of La Trobe, a character clearly evocative of her great aunt. Cameron had been present in Woolf’s imagination from her childhood, when she had first learned about her eccentricities and the richness of the Freshwater community from her mother’s reminiscences. Through the end of her writing career Woolf was still at work on several projects related to Cameron’s role, her tableaux, vision, theatrical aspirations, and contribution to history.

“The Dreadnought Hoax”: Two Abyssinian Princes

Cameron’s photography was likely the inspiration for a mischievous enterprise in which her grand niece participated in 1910. With her brother and other male friends, Woolf dressed up as Abyssinian “Prince Mendax” to play a trick on her cousin Commander William Fisher. They came aboard Fisher’s battleship, the H.M.S. Dreadnought, announcing themselves as a group of visiting dignitaries. Fisher was completely fooled and very angry when the deception was revealed to him in the newspaper the following morning, after having feted them royally. Woolf recounted the prank thirty years later to a receptive audience in a lecture at the Rodmell Women’s Institute in 1940 – at which time she was finishing Between the Acts. The manuscript of Woolf’s Dreadnought lecture has recently been retrieved and published for the first time by S.P. Rosenbaum in Platform of Time (182-200).

93 Cameron made several photographs of Fisher’s great grandmother, Florence Fisher, when Florence was very young. Two of these photos appear in the first edition of Woolf’s book, (Plates 23 & 24 in Victorian Photographs, reproduced in this project as fig. 78). Florence Fisher grew up to marry F.W. Maitland, Leslie Stephen’s biographer.
The visit of the putative dignitaries echoes an actual visit made by the Prince of Abyssinia to Cameron’s studio in 1868, when the young Prince Alamayou and his escort arrived on the Isle of Wight in order to be presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House. Cameron took advantage of their visit to make several photographs of the entourage in her studio. In “the Dreadnought Hoax,” Woolf was photographed in costume with her cohort, just as the Abyssinian Prince Alamayou and his entourage had been, forty-three years earlier by her great aunt.

King Theodore of Abyssinia, Alamayou’s father, had been a problem for the British for years; making demands of the government that were felt to be unreasonable. Instead of resolving the issues through diplomacy, in December of 1867 Parliament authorized an attack on Abyssinia to solve the difficulty. The British planned to invade the country for the purpose of releasing what they estimated were thirty British prisoners taken by King Theodore and held as hostages. It turned out there were only four, and the attack was devastating for the Abyssinians. The expedition into Abyssinia occurred against much criticism, cost England nine million pounds, and involved thousands of draft animals and troops. King Theodore released the four pampered British prisoners under heavy British fire, and offered to make peace. When General Napier ignored the offer and stormed his palace to take the king dead or alive, Theodore committed suicide, feeling betrayed by the British, whom he had admired and trusted.

Cameron’s photographs show the little boy in a tender and pensive attitude, looking sadly away from the camera. In one image he is held tenderly in the lap of his guardian, nicknamed “Captain Speedy” after the character in Jules Verne’s Around the World in Eighty Days. The series of pictures she made of the Abyssinian delegation may have been the result of the photographic opportunity that had been presented to her, or perhaps they were Cameron’s expression of consternation at British rule in Abyssinia; her feelings on the
subject, unexpressed verbally, were likely ambivalent. Two of the images of Prince Alamayou were included by Tristram Powell in the second edition of Woolf and Fry's collection of Cameron's work, *Victorian Photographs* (Plates 34 & 41).

Virginia Woolf's sympathies are easier to determine. From childhood she had heard criticism from her father about the government's action in Abyssinia, arousing her empathy for the little boy who, like Woolf herself in 1910, acutely felt the loss of his parents. Whether Alamayou's fate made her want to participate in the Dreadnought hoax in retribution is a matter of conjecture, although with our increasing scholarly awareness of Cameron's influence on Woolf, it seems quite likely. Certainly Woolf was aware of her brother's rivalry with Commander William Fisher, and his desire to play a prank on Fisher for the purpose of shrinking some of his puffery and self-conceit, but her own motivation probably ran more deeply than this, making her participation in the prank an act demonstrating the mutual, reciprocal influences between photography and life.

According to S.P. Rosenbaum, the *Dreadnought* Hoax “dispays the group of young people's emerging anti-military outlook, which is closely related to an increasing disillusionment with imperialism.” As Hermione Lee points out, “The hoax combined all possible forms of subversion: ridicule of empire, infiltration of the nation’s defences, mockery of bureaucratic procedures, cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity […] but the fact that one of the Abyssinians was a woman was the greatest source of indignation” (1996, 279). The *Dreadnought*, epitome of technological achievement in British warfare, reinforced the knightly role of Fisher as its commanding officer, the role a goodly steed played for a knight of the Round Table.

---

Panthea Reid suggests that Woolf had a broader motivation and wanted to participate in the *Dreadnought* hoax because she felt it “a fitting (though belated) response,” a “private allusion” to the plight of the little prince, known to Woolf through her great aunt’s almost photojournalistic images of the Abyssinian entourage (323). Though the evidence for this argument is circumstantial, it is possible that “the historically-minded Virginia herself chose the Abyssinian masquerade of the *Dreadnought* Hoax as an expression of solidarity. For it allowed, albeit posthumously, an Abyssinian Prince to take revenge against the colonial powers that cost him his family, his home, and eventually his life”(349). Reid believes that it was Woolf who suggested to her fellow conspirators that the nationality of their personae be Abyssinian.

Cameron’s photographs were instrumental in keeping the issue alive in her grandniece’s mind for the thirty years that elapsed between the initial incident and her talk at the Rodmell Women’s Institute in 1940. They also catalyzed two other events of a romantic nature. While Prince Alamayou and his entourage were staying in Freshwater Bay they lived with the family of Benjamin Cotton, Esq. at West Afton Manor. As Cameron noted in her *Annals*, seeing her photograph of Mary Ryan had caused the young Henry Cotton to fall in love with Ryan; they were married in 1867. During his stay at the Cottons’, Captain Speedy became engaged to Henry Cotton’s younger sister Tiny; he married her in December 1868. Both Captain Speedy and Mary Ryan were photographed by Cameron at the time they first met and became attached to Tiny and Henry Cotton, their respective future spouses.

Woolf describes an incident similar to the *Dreadnought* Hoax in her short story “The Society,” in which a group of young women form “a society for asking questions” to “find out what the world is like” – what men have made of it (SF 119). Their little group is intended to be a counterpart of another society: the Apostles, to which Tennyson and most of the males in Woolf’s immediate circle belonged. Each woman of the outsiders’ society was assigned a
principle to explore. One of them, Rosie, who was to investigate the nature of “honour,” a knightly virtue, dresses up as an Ethiopian and boards a British ship. She is discovered and punished by being lightly caned by the officer in charge, to whom she returns the favor, embarrassing him deeply. When the humorous episode is recounted to the society, they laugh heartily at first, but observe that they escaped serious harm in their various experiments only because “men are at once so hungry and so chivalrous” (132). The “society” in the story is comprised of women who feel themselves to be outsiders, border cases who are able to critique mainstream British life effectively because of their perspective from the margins. In her Illustrations, Cameron portrays a series of border cases – women acting outside the roles scripted for them – demonstrating both sorry outcomes and creative and constructive alternatives.

*Freshwater*

Cameron was deeply associated in Woolf’s mind with theatrical production. She chose to write her only play, *Freshwater*, about her great aunt and the little group of friends gathered around her on West Wight in the nineteenth century, connecting it with Bloomsbury through the figure of Ellen Terry.

In her thirties Woolf made note of the potential that her eccentric great aunt Julia Margaret Cameron afforded as a literary subject:

[…] for future use, the superb possibilities of Freshwater, for a comedy. Old Cameron dressed in a blue dressing gown & not going beyond his garden for 12 years, suddenly borrows his son’s coat, & walks down to the sea. Then
they decide to proceed to Ceylon, taking their coffins with them & the last sight of Aunt Julia is on board ship, presenting porters with large photographs of Sir Henry Taylor & the Madonna in default of small change.

*(Diary 1: 237, 31 January 1919)*

This scene of departure, with Charles Cameron in his dressing gown, evokes the image (fig. 14) of his performance as Merlin in an oversized coat being imprisoned in the hollow oak in Volume One of the *Illustrations*. In the photographic version, Vivien, his captor acts as Cameron’s surrogate, preventing him from leaving the garden.

Woolf sensed there was a large reservoir of fascinating material available in the goings-on of the eminent Isle of Wight Victorians. Tennyson, Watts, Ellen Terry, and the Queen herself, vacationing in nearby Osborne House, provided plenty of material for her pen. Cameron had unknowingly obliged Woolf by virtually illustrating *Freshwater* with photographs of everyone in the cast save the Queen, before Woolf’s birth. She would undoubtedly have included Victoria too, had she been granted access. *Freshwater* is Woolf’s only play, except for the pageant in *Between the Acts*, an indication that Cameron was associated in her mind with dramatic performance.

Finally performed on January 18, 1935 as a drawing room comedy in her sister’s flat, Woolf’s three-act play *Freshwater* takes place on a single day in the life of the Camerons. Their departure for Ceylon and Ellen Terry’s escape to Bloomsbury provide the through line. The representative day on which Woolf set *Freshwater* is actually a conflation of several days across a few years occurring in Cameron’s life and beyond. Rather than directing this amateur theatrical, Cameron stars in it. A mixture of historical, imagined, and borrowed events take place: it is the day in 1875 on which the Camerons departed for Ceylon with their coffins and goat, immediately after the publication of the second volume
of the Illustrations. Woolf contrives to have Ellen Terry escape Freshwater by meeting and eloping with John Craig, moving the focus ahead to Freshwater’s Bloomsbury counterpart; Tennyson receive his baronetcy in a surprise visit from the Queen at the end, adding to the preposterous fun.

The 1923 draft version of Freshwater critiques the Victorians more sharply than does the final script of the play, which exaggerates the comic aspects of the personalities, focusing on each of their particular personal foibles rather than on the aestheticism, hero worship, and moral sensibility of the age. In Freshwater Woolf alludes to the stanzas from Maud, words that Cameron had lithographed as accompaniment for the last photo in Volume Two of the Illustrations. It was, not coincidentally, one of the Laureate’s favorite passages for recitation, the recording of which Woolf may have heard. Certainly she would have remembered her father’s voice intoning the Laureate’s words:

She is coming, my own, my sweet,
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

The image that accompanies these lines from Maud (fig. 56) adds to the identity of this passage as the oft-recited, personal favorite of Tennyson’s an association with the person of Mary Hillier, the maid Cameron called “Mary Madonna” – who in this photograph looks westward at the past, entwined in passion flower vines and blossoms, a “splendid tear” reflecting in her eye. Woolf quotes other lines from Maud in the draft version of the essay A Room of One’s Own (49), from the passage beginning “Come into the garden Maud.” In the final version of the essay (AROO 12) she repeats the passage cited above. Woolf luxuriates
in Tennyson’s voluptuous poetic language, while mocking the purple and red blossoms by having Tennyson complain

If I weren’t the most stoical man in the world, the very skin on my wrists would rise and blossom in purple and red at the innumerable bites of the poisoned bugs and pismires of the Press. (Freshwater 71)

Woolf may have had in mind the passage in her father’s essay in which he quotes Tennyson’s remark that, “A flea will annoy me [...] a fleabite will spread a square inch over the surface of my skin...I am thin-skinned and I take no pains to hide it” (Stephen 218).95

This passage, in which Tennyson comments on the pismires of the Press comes from the 1923 draft version of the play, which, though only twenty pages in length – one tenth as long as the final 1935 script – addressed the Freshwater friends’ aesthetics and philosophy more specifically than does the final script. It also sports playful descriptions of the photographer and mocks the Victorian poses portrayed in Cameron’s photographs. In this early version, Woolf describes Mrs. Cameron as “a brown-faced gipsylike-looking old woman, wearing a green shawl, fastened by an enormous cameo” (F 66), an exotic image which is repeated later in her essay on Cameron in Victorian Photographs, and again in her portrait of La Trobe in Between the Acts.

Woolf proves her thorough familiarity with Tennyson’s work in the final version of Freshwater by the abundance of her quotations from the Laureate’s poems. In addition to the above passage from Maud, she includes additional lines from that poem: one describing the “Queen Rose of the rosebud garden of girls” (Freshwater 40) -- Cameron illustrated the line (fig. 77), by gathering together the four somber Fraser-Tytler sisters – Nelly, Christina,

95 Studies of a Biographer, Vol. 2
Mary and Ethel -- one of whom would later become G.F. Watts’ second wife – and
surrounding them with a plenitude of rose blossoms in a memorable portrait. In another
quotation from Tennyson she describes how “Low on the sand and loud on the stone the
last wheel echoes away” (Freshwater 43-4). There are two quotes from The Princess: “The
moan of doves in immemorial elms. / And murmuring of innumerable bees” (Freshwater
16), and the line that Ellen Terry recites from Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears” about the ship
“that sinks with all we love below the verge” (Freshwater 23) which Cameron illustrated
(fig. 44). From In Memoriam (27) comes the line, “’Tis better to have loved and lost”
(Freshwater 34, 44). “Wearing the white flower of a blameless life” is an allusion to the
Dedication of the Idylls, and the line of his own making that Tennyson praises as the most
beautiful words in the language (from “The Gardener’s Daughter”): “the mellow ouzel
fluting on the lawn” (Freshwater 16). By burlesquing Tennyson in the play, Woolf allows
herself to enjoy the sensuous pleasure of quoting his poetry while still rebelling against her
Victorian heritage. Writing about Cameron’s close friendship with Tennyson in the play may
have enabled her to see his poems in a new perspective -- no other work of Woolf’s is as full
of his verse as Freshwater.

In the 1923 version of the play, Charles Cameron tells of his dream – more like a
nightmare -- of a time in which “great men were no longer respected” (Freshwater 73),
giving voice to his Victorian anxiety about the deterioration of patriarchal civilization. G.F.
Watts hopefully counters with his belief that “there will come a day when the voice of
purity, of conscience, of highmindedness, of nobility, and truth, will again be heard in the
land” (Freshwater 82), demonstrating Woolf’s take on the naive Utopianism of the Victorian
vision. Later Watts affirms the Ruskinian moral mandate for his art: “It shall never be said
that George Frederick Watts painted a single hair that did not tend directly -- or indirectly --
to the spiritual and moral elevation of the British Public” (Freshwater 75). These statements
may make us chuckle today, but as concrete examples of embodied Victorian ideals, they are not far off course. The graphic arts and theatre could inspire both the illiterate and the reading Victorian public alike by offering sanctioned icons of excellence. The visual supersedes the written word in its educational reach.

In absurdly inflated prose which mocks many of our present-day gallery catalog entries, Cameron describes Tennyson posed for a potential photo:

“Look at the outline of the nose against the ivy! Look at the hair tumbling like Atlantic billows on a stormy night! And the eyes -- [...] they are like pools of living light in which thoughts play like dolphins among groves of coral.” (*Freshwater* 78)

This florid verbal portrait of Tennyson, which evokes Cameron's photograph of *Maud* in the *Illustrations*, catches the cadences of Cameron's voice as well as her characteristically hyperbolic conceits in prose she might herself have used. Choosing awkwardly staged image of “The Holy Grail” (fig. 20) from the *Illustrations* as the butt of her humor, Woolf’s Cameron describes her plans to make a photograph of “Sir Galahad watching the Holy Grail by moonlight” (*Freshwater* 66). The irreverence of Woolf's irony in these gushing descriptions functions as a comic antidote to Cameron’s unrelentingly earnest sentimentality.

The model for *Maud* in the *Illustrations* is Cameron’s maid Mary Hillier, whom Cameron nicknamed “Mary Madonna.” Woolf gives her the name “Mary Magdalene” in the play -- no doubt for the fun of pronouncing her name “maudlin” and invoking the Magdalene’s early associations with harlotry. In *Freshwater*, Mary advises Charles Cameron that “Mrs. Cameron will never let you go to India” (*Freshwater* 66) – i.e. move from
England. In the 1935 version Mary Magdalene also possesses attributes of Cameron’s servant Mary Ryan, who married Sir Henry Cotton; using a little poetic license, Woolf has the character complain “I’m sick of parlour work. I’ll marry the earl and live like a respectable gurl in a Castle” (*Freshwater* 50).

In the draft version of *Freshwater*, Cameron ultimately leaves her camera behind, giving it to Ellen Terry as a wedding gift with the words, “[t]ake my lens. I bequeath it to my descendents. See that it is always slightly out of focus” (*Freshwater* 83). Woolf thus recognizes the intimate relationship Cameron had with her lens, in effect making Terry the through line to the future and the main character of the comedy.

*Freshwater* is set at the moment Cameron had finished writing her *Annals*, published the *Illustrations*, and was saying farewell to her photographic aspirations in England. Though she took some photographs in Ceylon, the heat and humidity were not conducive to photography. The climate also exacerbated her breathing problems, making it difficult for her to exert any sustained effort. Cameron effectively left her unfocused lens in Britain; all the photographs she made in the Dimbola of the East are sharply focused; most are portraits of indigenous people. There were to be no more big head portraits or theatrical scenes, as Cameron passed her artistic torch off to Ellen Terry, the Freshwater diva who succeeded her.

Woolf mocks the “great man” worship of the nineteenth century in the play: Tennyson is portrayed as having an inflated self-image, indicated by his appropriating the language of the biblical description of Christ to himself. He calls himself “the son of man” who “has nowhere to lay his head” -- a reference to Luke 9:58 (*Freshwater* 8, 16).

---

96 In the script, Woolf changes their destination from Ceylon to India, enabling her actors to sing out the name “Ind’-jah” with incisive British emphasis and inflection.
In the final (1935) version of the play, much is made of the syntax and musical sound of the characters’ words. The dialogue throughout the comedy varies in tempo and inflection; sometimes it is fast-paced, sometimes slow; the voices contrapuntal, the patterns fugue-like. The Victorians’ speech is ornate – crowded with abstract nouns and superlatives. in writing the play, Woolf had immersed herself in Victorian material paraphernalia: “masses of Cameron photographs, shawls, cameos, peg-top trousers, laurel trees, laureates, and all the rest” – the kind of props used in the literary illustrations. Ellen Terry is thrilled to flee the affectation and get to Bloomsbury, where she will hear no Keatsian nightingales sing, no sensuous poetry recited, and no high purposes elaborated.

*Freshwater* was performed as an after-dinner entertainment in honor of Angelica Bell’s seventeenth birthday at her mother’s London studio at 8 Fitzroy Place. Approximately eighty people were in attendance. Vanessa herself played the part of Cameron, and Leonard Woolf was Cameron’s husband Charles. The entertainment was a raucous success: an “unbuttoned laughing evening,” Woolf termed it in her diary the next day. To emphasize the lack of skill needed for her role as director, Woolf “hire[d] a donkey’s head to take [her curtain] call in – by way of saying this is donkeys work” (D 4:273, L 5:365). Her role in composing, staging, directing, and coaching the actors in *Freshwater* parallels Cameron’s role in devising and executing her tableaux vivants and La Trobe’s in directing the pageant in *Between the Acts*. Woolf’s donkey’s head implies the limited respect she had for Cameron’s role of director, associating the job with Bottom the Weaver and Peter Quince’s amateur theatricals. At this early point in her writing, Woolf distanced herself from her great aunt through her humor. Over the course of the next six years her appreciation and understanding of Cameron’s vision, theatrical power, and talent grew – as witnessed by

---

97 Letter to Desmond McCarthy, October 7, 1923: L3:73.
her last novel, in which a Cameron surrogate plays the key role of artist and creator of a different kind of artistic community.

Though her great aunt is presented as an eccentric and affected despot in the play, *Freshwater* is a gentle spoof, not a bitter indictment of the Victorians. Woolf contrasts Victorian moral values and intense emotionalism with what the Bloomsbury group saw as its own rational effort to construct a life of artistic freedom and intellectual honesty. She writes with affectionate good humor about the Freshwater friends. They are foolish, not evil. In Woolf's earlier novels, including the novel-essay section of *The Years* that she called *The Pargiters*, the confrontation between the Victorians and Edwardians, by contrast, is deadly serious and quite painful.

*Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women*

Cameron's images were Woolf's old friends – she literally grew up surrounded by them. Her family owned a large collection of her great aunt's photographs, and when the Stephen children moved to 46 Gordon Square in Bloomsbury from the dark and overstuffed house on Hyde Park Gate, Vanessa hung the photographic portraits of famous men on one side of the entrance hallway, balanced by several different images of their mother facing them on the opposite wall. For years their Thursday night discussion group walked between the “procession of educated men” (TG 94) and images of Woolf's iconic maternal “Angel in the House” each time they gathered.98 The Bloomsbury salon thus began and ended in a

98 Vanessa listed the photos to her sister, “I have been hanging pictures in the hall. I hope you'll approve….On the right hand side as you come in I have put a row of celebrities: 1. Herschel – Aunt Julia's photograph. 2. Lowell. 3. Darwin. 4. father. 5. Tennyson. 6. Browning. 7. Meredith – Watts’ portrait. Then on the opposite side I have put five of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother. They look very beautiful all together” (letter from Vanessa to Virginia, qtd. in Christopher Reed, “'A Room of One's Own': The Bloomsbury' Group's Creation of a Modernist
Cameron-authored theatrical procession. These photos, acquired recently by the Art Institute of Chicago, still bear the fade marks on their edges made by the frames that held them and display original unretouched imperfections resulting from the individualized handiwork that Cameron lavished on each of them. Though the Illustrations tableaux were not part of the wall display at Gordon Square, nor were they deemed suitable for reproduction in the book she and Roger Fry wrote about Cameron, or Tristram Powell’s second edition, they were well known to Woolf and apparently persisted in her memory.

Woolf began to collect letters, photographs, and other documents for her book about Cameron, Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women, published in 1926, three years after she had first drafted Freshwater. The book consists of twenty-four of Cameron’s large-format photographs in sepia, an essay by Roger Fry on Cameron’s photography, and a seven-page account of Cameron’s life authored by Woolf. As Victoria Olsen observes, “[i]n a sense, Cameron’s story begins when her great-niece Virginia Woolf began writing it down” (2006, 3). Woolf was the first to craft her great aunt’s life into a shapely whole for public consumption; anecdotes about her had previously been passed down among family members but not recorded. While Freshwater is the synchronic, hyperbolic account of a day in the life of the West Wight friends, Woolf’s “Julia Margaret Cameron” presents her life longitudinally across years and miles, going back in time to two previous generations to trace her family history. The essay places Cameron’s life in the context of the years she lived in India, Africa, France, and Ceylon, as well as England, and describes her numerous friends,

99 In one of Woolf’s earliest stories, posthumously titled “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” the protagonist, Rosamund Merridew, walks among the family portraits of the farmer she is visiting, scrutinizing each one. They are all male ancestors. Then she discovers the eponymous journal kept by a young woman of the family centuries before. The story was written in 1906; the Stephen children had moved to 46 Gordon Square in 1904. It is tempting to see a connection with Cameron here, especially since Woolf mentions King Arthur in this story: he was not to appear again till Between the Acts, “The Searchlight,” and Anon at the end of her career.
family members, and acquaintances. Woolf does not mention Cameron’s photographic career until the fifth of the essay’s seven pages, where she spends only one paragraph chronicling it. Her lively biographical approach is complemented by Roger Fry’s shorter piece on Cameron’s oeuvre and its aesthetics, “Mrs. Cameron’s Photographs.” Writing Freshwater primed Woolf for work on Victorian Photographs: each of these two works provides a portrait of Cameron’s life and photography from a different perspective.

The Freshwater drafts of “The Searchlight,” portraying Cameron’s studio and West Wight life on a summer’s day, are discussed at the end of this chapter; they add one more impression to the aggregated conceptions of Cameron’s life. Ultimately it is Between the Acts with its account of a day in the life of a rural English village in the summer of 1939 and its “Anon” in the person of the director of literary scenes – an artist functioning as Cameron’s counterpart – that is the corrective for Woolf’s hilarious burlesque presentation of her great aunt in Freshwater.

While preparing Victorian Photographs, Woolf was beginning work on To the Lighthouse, the novel based on her childhood that she published in 1927. She included three photographs of her mother in Victorian Photographs (Plates 15, 16, and 19), one of them the iconic profile portrait of Julia Jackson set in deep shadow (fig. 73). Throughout her life Woolf was reading, thinking, and writing about her family, focusing especially on the two generations preceding hers. She sat for her portrait in 1926 for the British edition of Vogue in Thomas Woolner’s former studio, wearing a dress of her mother’s, eyes averted, as her mother had often posed for Cameron.

Woolf’s equivocal attitude toward the Victorian period is evident in the biographical essay she wrote about Cameron, in which she observes that “the least departure from family morality was vigilantly pounced upon and volubly imparted” (VP 1973, 16). In Orlando Woolf characterizes the Victorian era as “a black cloud” (156-7), though the period is
subsumed into a time of colorful eccentricity and filled with the irrepressible vitality of her great aunt’s personality in her essay in \textit{Victorian Photographs}.

The expanded 1973 edition of the book contains nearly twice as many photos as the first edition, and includes a disclaimer by Tristram Powell following Woolf’s entertaining essay, in which Powell suggests “some corrections” to the “impressions” that Woolf gave which “were not always strictly accurate” (VP 1973, 21). Compared to the historically verifiable essay that Woolf’s mother wrote about Cameron for her husband’s first edition of the \textit{Dictionary of National Biography}, published in 1917, Woolf’s embellished pieces about her great aunt are engagingly hyperbolic.

Julia Stephen’s “Cameron” was one of the very few entries describing a woman to appear in the \textit{Dictionary of National Biography}, at least in its earliest editions. It is telling that Woolf’s mother thought to include mention of Cameron’s sisters’ marriages, Carlyle’s reaction to the valentine Cameron sent him, her friendships with literati, a very long quotation about her from Henry Taylor’s \textit{Autobiography}, and Cameron’s accomplishment of translating Burger’s \textit{Leonora} -- her “only separate publication” -- while omitting mention of the two-volume photographic \textit{Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King} and \textit{Other Poems}:

\textbf{CAMERON, JULIA MARGARET} (1815-1879), photographer, born at Calcutta on 11 June 1815, was the third daughter of James Pattie of the Bengal civil service. In 1838 she married Charles Hay Cameron [q.v.], then member of the law commission in Calcutta. Her other sisters married General Colin Mackenzie [q.v.], Henry Thoby Prinsep [q.v.], Dr. Jackson, M.D., Henry Vincent Bayley, judge of the supreme court of Calcutta, and nephew of Henry Vincent Bayley [q.v.], Earl Somers, and John Wrarrinder Dalrymple of the Bengal civil service. Miss Pattie was well known in Calcutta society for her brilliant conversation. She showed her philanthropy in 1846, when, through her energy and influence, she was able to raise a considerable sum for the relief of the sufferers in the Irish famine. Mrs. Cameron came to England with her husband and family in 1848. They resided in London and afterwards went to Putney, and in 1860 settled at Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, where they were the neighbours and friends of Lord Tennyson. In 1875 they went to Ceylon; they visited England in 1878, and returned to Ceylon, where she died on 26 Jan. 1879.
Mrs. Cameron was known and beloved by a large circle of friends. She corresponded with Wordsworth; she was well known to Carlyle, who, on receiving one of her yearly valentines, ‘This comes from Mrs. Cameron or the devil.’ Sir Henry Taylor, a valued friend, says of her in his ‘Autobiography’ (II: 48): ‘If her husband was of a high intellectual order, and as such naturally fell to her lot, the friends that fell to her were not less so. Foremost of them all were Sir John Herschel and Lord Hardinge …Sir Edward Ryan, who had been the early friend of her husband, was not less devoted to her in the last days of his long life than he had been from the times in which they first met….It was indeed impossible that we should not grow fond of her – impossible for us, and not less so for the many whom her genial, ardent, and generous nature has captivated ever since.’ A characteristic story of one of her many acts of persevering benevolence is told in the same volume (pp. 185-8). Her influence on all classes was marked and admirable. She was unusually outspoken, but her genuine sympathy and goodness of heart saved her from ever alienating a friend.

At the age of fifty she took up photography, which in her hands became truly artistic, instead of possessing merely mechanical excellence. She gained gold, silver, and bronze medals in America, Austria, Germany, and England. She has left admirable portraits of many distinguished persons. Among her sitters were the Crown Prince and Princess of Prussia, Charles Darwin, Lord Tennyson, Mr. Browning, Herr Joachim, and Sir John Herschel, who had been her friend from her early girlhood. Mrs. Cameron wrote many poems, some of which appeared in ‘Macmillan’s Magazine.’ Her only separate publication was a translation of Burger’s ‘Leonora,’ published in 1847.

[Personal knowledge] J.P.S.


Original ellipses

A comparison of Woolf’s version of Cameron with her mother’s is illuminating. It almost seems as if Woolf wrote her essay about Cameron’s life and career in response to Julia Stephen’s. The most outrageously exaggerated part of Woolf’s essay occurs at the very beginning, setting the tone for what follows. Here Woolf describes Cameron’s father, whom she refers to as “Jim Blazes,”

[...] a gentlemen of marked, but doubtful, reputation, who after living a riotous life and bearing the title of “the biggest liar in India,” finally drank himself to death and was consigned to a cask of rum to await shipment to England. The cask was stood outside the widow’s bedroom door. In the middle of the night she heard a violent explosion, rushed out, and found her husband, having burst the lid off his coffin, bolt upright menacing her in
death as he had menaced her in life [...]. after “Jim Blazes” had been nailed down again and shipped off, the sailors drank the liquor in which the body was preserved, “and, by Jove, the rum ran out and got alight and set the ship on fire! And while they were trying to extinguish the flames she ran on a rock, blew up, and drifted ashore just below Hooghly.” (VP 1973, 13)

This is certainly not the sort of information that Julia Stephen, in her role of Angel in the House, would have considered appropriate to include as a description of her grandfather. In response to this rather lurid passage, Tristram Powell remarks that “there is no evidence to suggest that James Pattle, who held responsible posts on the financial and judicial side of the Bengal Civil Service, drank more than his contemporaries,” and suggests that he was probably being confused in this passage with “his brother Colonel Pattle who had the reputation of being wild and untruthful” (VP 1973, 21). Powell’s explanation is not convincing: Woolf had obtained the gossipy information about her great-great grandfather “Jim Blazes” Pattle from Ethel Smyth, whose father had known him well in India. Smyth’s father called Pattle “‘as big a scamp as you ever saw, and a bad fellow in every way. Behaved very ill to his wife too, but she was devoted to him and when – well, anything went wrong, he used to say it couldn’t be helped now and she was quite satisfied and forgave him again and again’” (251). Woolf was intent on creating a jolly, colorful effect to enhance her narrative, and relished her ancestor’s juicy violation of proper Victorian etiquette, but left out all accounts of his cruel, misogynist behavior.

Whether precisely factual or exaggerated, Woolf’s biographical sketch captures the flavor of Cameron’s emotional energy and warmth. In language reminiscent of Henry Taylor’s, she describes her great aunt’s “gift of ardent speech and picturesque behavior,” her “love of beauty and distaste for the cold and formal conventions of English society” (VP 1973, 13), along with her impulsiveness, generosity, enthusiasm, and persuasiveness (VP 1973, 14). She quotes Laura, Lady Troubridge, whose Memories and Reflections Woolf had reviewed for The Nation and Athenaeum in an essay she called “Pattledom” (August 1,
1925), a book in which Troubridge characterized Cameron as “a terrifying apparition, ‘short and squat, with none of the Pattle grace and beauty about her, though more than her share of their passionate energy and willfulness’” (VP 1973, 15). Woolf also quotes generously from *The Autobiography of Sir Henry Taylor*, who estimates that Cameron’s “‘genius, (of which she has a great deal) is too profuse and redundant, not distinguishing between felicitous and infelicitous,’” and notes that she has “more of hope than of reason” about her, her spirits alternating “‘between seventh heaven and the bottomless pit’” (Ibid 17). At the end of her essay Woolf characterizes Cameron briskly as having been “caustic and candid of tongue [...as well as] odd and bold [in] her methods of conversation,” (Ibid 17). This is a more complete portrait, compared with her mother’s factual entry in the *DNB*, though it does not attempt an understanding or analysis of Cameron’s motivation and thought from inside her mind and heart. In both *Freshwater* and the biographical essay of *Victorian Photographs*, Cameron is presented as an eccentric, ambitious, imperious, even despotic woman. Woolf’s modernist perspective and cheeky sense of humor shaped her entertaining introduction to Cameron, allowing for little empathy with the sensibilities and difficulties of the photographer’s life. In thus preserving a distance from her great aunt through the use of comedy and exaggeration, Woolf remained outside Cameron’s “bridal chamber of the heart” (*Annals* 1) in her imagination for another dozen years, allowing it to remain as tightly closed as the photographer herself had wished.

Much is revealed about the state of Woolf’s relationship with her great aunt in 1926 by the choice of photographs included in the book she wrote with Roger Fry. There were only two hundred forty copies printed in the first edition of *Victorian Photographs*. Once they sold out, the book remained out of print until a second edition was published in 1973, at which time twenty photographs were added to the original two dozen she had chosen. There are no photos from the *Illustrations* included in the original edition of the book,
though Tristram Powell added “The Death of Elaine” (fig. 52, VP Plate 32) to the second edition. The images that Woolf originally chose for Victorian Photographs -- with the exception of four “allegorical” images enacted by women -- are all portraits, most of them of men. The three women appearing as themselves in the 1926 edition are Cameron in the Frontispiece, Woolf’s mother, identified by both her husbands’ names: “Mrs. Leslie Stephen (Mrs. Herbert Duckworth)” (VP Plates 15, 16, & 19), and the young Florence Fisher, grandmother of the Dreadnought’s Commander, who appears as “Florence” (VP Plates 23 & 24). The other photos represent selections from Cameron’s collection of “big head” portraits -- her Pantheon of heroes -- or “procession of educated men” (TG 94). The first two portraits are both designated identically as “Sir J.F.W. Herschel,” followed by one each of “Henry W. Longfellow,” “Alfred Tennyson,” “Robert Browning,” “G.F. Watts,” “Joseph Joachim,” “Professor Jowett,” “Charles Darwin,” “Thomas Carlyle,” “Joseph D. Hooker,” “Sir Henry Taylor,” “Frank Charteris,” and “Rt. Hon. Edward Ryan.” Tristram Powell preserved this pageant of great men in the 1973 edition, adding four images relevant to this study: two photos of Prince Alamayou of Abyssinia (VP Plates 34 & 41, reproduced in this project as fig. 83 in Appendix B), one of Lionel Tennyson dressed for his part in an amateur theatrical performed at Cameron’s little theatre (VP Plate 42; Appendix B, fig. 73), and the beautiful (though peeling) image of Ellen Terry (VP Plate 26; Appendix B, fig. 95).

---

100 The four women’s images that Woolf chose for the first edition of Victorian Photographs are Mary Hillier as “Mary Mother” (Plate 18) and “Sappho” (Plate 20), Hattie Campbell as “The Echo” (Plate 21), and the four Fraser-Tytler sisters as “The Rosebud Garden of Girls” (Plate 22, reproduced as fig. 77 in this dissertation).

101 Note that, while Henry Taylor’s name bears the prefix “Sir,” reflecting the fact that he had been knighted in 1869, Tennyson is designated only as “Alfred Tennyson,” indicating his status when the photo was taken: he did not accept his baronetcy until 1883, four years after Cameron’s death.
“The Searchlight”

Woolf’s vision of her great aunt’s life and career began to evolve slowly over many years, as her writing about Cameron indicates. The advent of a second devastating war, which motivated her anti-war polemic *Three Guineas*, prepared the way for this revision. Her last two works, *Between the Acts* and “Anon,” show a new understanding of the role of the solitary artist and the power of theatrical performance. This pivotal change in Woolf’s attitude and orientation is evident in the drafts of the short story she worked on from 1929 until her death, published posthumously as “The Searchlight.”

Associations linking the mechanism of the searchlight to a spotlight in the theatre – as well as the theatre of war – show up several times in Woolf’s writing. She envisioned memory and time as searchlights: *The Years* opens with the observation that, “Slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, the weeks, the years passed one after another across the sky” (4). In her diary, Woolf describes the preparations for war as a “dress rehearsal” that was “complete” in 1939: “Museums shut. Searchlight on Rodmell Hill” (D5:231). She converted the wartime searchlight that invaded the night sky into a peacetime instrument of visionary capability in her fiction. She finished the final version of *Between the Acts* along with “The Searchlight” while transforming the beams of war that crisscrossed overhead as agents of inspiration and connection.
Looking at Cameron Through “The Searchlight” and its Drafts

“Oh the old Pattles! They're always bursting out of their casks” Woolf exclaimed to her sister in 1937 (Letters 6:120, 13 April 1937). Cameron’s father’s cask-bursting, a lively but possibly apocryphal tale, is a metaphor for the way Cameron intruded on Woolf’s imagination. Her essay on her great aunt shows Woolf’s preference for the kind of biographical and historical writing that allows fact to be directed by spirited imagination. In “Women and Fiction”, the manuscript version of A Room of One’s Own, she had described the fertile combination of “two immensely valuable searchlights” – fact and fiction – which “working side by side” would allow us to “see what has never yet been seen” (72). She practiced an imaginative creativity in her nonfiction writing; a technique which she believed brought her closer to the heart of “truth” than reporting only empirical evidence ever could.

Shortly after she finished Freshwater, Woolf began drafting a story based on an anecdote from Sir Henry Taylor’s youth, composing a group of drafts which she titled in succession “The Telescope,” “What the Telescope Discovered,” “Incongruous Memories,” “Inaccurate Memories,” “A Scene from the Past,” and finally “The Searchlight.” A voluminous mass of typescripts exist for this story, which indicates the importance it had for Woolf and the effort she put into getting it right. Since all versions of the story focus on the life-changing experience of seeing, her numerous revisions show her appreciation for the power of visual images.

Woolf’s prior writing about her great aunt had made Cameron come alive as an extraordinary historical figure. With all its hyperbolic satire, her presentation of Cameron
in *Freshwater* captures the photographer’s voice as it rings out in her letters and the autobiographical “Annals of My Glass House.” The version of her great aunt in *Victorian Photographs*, especially in the description of her life in Ceylon – a lush verbal portrait – is an index to Woolf’s intuitive understanding of how Cameron lived in that faraway land, and is based more on her imagination than on any experience accessible to her. It is derived from the animated letters Cameron wrote during those four years, the anecdotes that were passed along by her family and friends, and Woolf’s conversations with her husband Leonard, who had served in Ceylon before their marriage, plumped up by her imaginative and intuitive understanding of her great aunt.

Woolf wrote that Cameron’s voice “impressed itself on the calm pages of Victorian biography” (VP 1973, 13); that may be true of her artistic “voice,” but the impression of her personal voice was accomplished most effectively through the skillful and animated writing of her grand niece. The biographical sketch about Cameron written by Woolf’s mother Julia Prinsep Stephen captures none of the flavor of her personality. Though *Freshwater* and *Victorian Photographs* both contain vivid portraits of the photographer as she existed in society, they do not study her aims, motivations, and the oscillations of her moods – nor her accomplishments. Woolf melts away the barriers between herself and Cameron most successfully in “The Searchlight,” a journey which can be traced through the evolution of the successive draft versions. Paradoxically, it is by ultimately eliminating Cameron from the story that Woolf came to understand her life as an artist most deeply.

**A: “What the telescope discovered”**

Over the period of a decade, the story which became “The Searchlight” metamorphosed from a simple recounting of a vignette from Henry Taylor’s youth to a
layered, complicated tale involving King Arthur, Freshwater, her great aunt's lens, and the magic of theatrical performance. Woolf had been perusing Taylor's two-volume *Autobiography* in the mid-1920's, searching for background material for her essay on Cameron. She read his description of how, as a young man he had lived in the North of England with his parents in “an old square ivy-covered border tower” at Witton-le-Wear, on the edge of Scotland. The tower was surrounded by desolate moors, which increased his sense of isolation. Taylor writes, however, that he found “something exciting in the sense of solitude” (qtd. in de Gay 212). At one point, his parents away on a trip for three weeks, he was left alone in the tower:

All the day long I saw no one but the servants, except that I sometimes looked through a telescope [...] at the goings on of a farmstead on a road which skirted our grounds at the farther end. Through this telescope I once saw a young daughter of the farmer rush into the arms of her brother, on his return after an absence, radiant with joy. I think this was the only phenomenon of human emotion which I had witnessed for three years.

(*Autobiography* I: 44-45)

Her imagination captured by the feelings and images evoked by the vignette, Woolf began by telling the story in the first set of drafts, “What the telescope discovered” (MH/B9.j, 1929). In this initial attempt she does not give a straightforward account of what Taylor thought and felt. She portrays him as lonely and vulnerable, searching for

---

102 Typescript and holograph drafts of “The Searchlight” are in the Monk’s House Papers (MH/B9,B10,and B19), University of Sussex. They comprise thirteen versions of the story and six fragments, and include odd pages from an essay on Ellen Terry, *Between the Acts*, and *Reading at Random*. Four of the final version of “The Searchlight” drafts are in the Monk’s House Papers in Sussex (B 19:10-33), and the fifth, reproduced as the final version by Susan Dick in 1985, is in the Frances Hooper Collection of Woolf’s Books and Manuscripts at Smith College.
something indefinable as he stops exploring the heavens and turns his telescope to the earth. He focuses on a farm two miles away, where he spies a farm boy suddenly and passionately embracing a servant girl:


[...] suddenly the disc of light fell upon two faces -- a man’s and a woman’s; within that ring of perfect clearness they were held fast. An extraordinary expression was on their faces; they closed together; they kissed. It was miles away; but the shock was like a blow on his own shoulder. There was life, there was love, there was passion! (MH/B91.5)

Altered by this vision, Taylor pushes aside the telescope and runs down the stairs and out into the world to seek his fortune.

The incident occurs during the evening, apparently at twilight. It is dark enough to see “the planets”, and yet Taylor’s telescope possesses the power to illuminate the couple’s embrace, as if it were an instrument of revelation as well as a tool for scientific exploration. The telescope functions similarly to Cameron’s lens, capturing an image which becomes iconic and remains strong in memory, able to influence the future. As Holly Henry notes, “[t]he apparatus of the telescope had a powerful shaping effect on Woolf’s aesthetic imagination”(1).

**B: “Incongruous/Inaccurate Memories”**

In the course of the following year, “What the telescope discovered” evolved into the second set of drafts, catalogued under the rubric “Inaccurate Memories” (MH/B9k). The introduction to this version of the story contains Woolf’s explanation of her creative
method, and constitutes the only theoretical part of the drafts of “The Searchlight.” The opening passage describes a process by which certain words or scenes continue to live, change, and grow in the mind “long after the context in which they were found has been forgotten.” These “changes and rearrangements are only the unfurling of a scene when dropped into sympathetic waters” and “are not travesties” (MH/B9.k.1). On the contrary, “inaccuracy is very often a superior form of truth.” This meditation on the power of the creative unconscious to develop ideas, when given time and freedom, is similar to the passage in Woolf’s essay “Craftsmanship,” in which she describes how words have a life of their own in the mind:

And how do they live in the mind? Variously and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love, and mating together [....] Thus to lay down any laws for such irreclaimable vagabonds is worse than useless. (CE 2: 250)

Words migrate to each other, combining and recombining to make new meanings. In the typescript draft of “Inaccurate Memories” Woolf observes that “[a] live word wandering about in the mind will attract and draw to itself others and arouse associations and so form a new group of ideas which may be hardly recognisable when compared with the original” (MH/B9.k.1).

Great writers have the knack of suggestion, she observes. They place a few words together for a moment and the reader can “hear the reverberations up valleys and down hills for a long time afterwards.” But the most valuable transformation is what happens when “people of no artistry, no reticence, no great power over language, and without apparent gift for description” succeed in this kind of suggestiveness almost in spite of
themselves, most often in writing autobiographically. Henry Taylor is one of these writers; so is Julia Margaret Cameron. “They present us with a scene, all of a sudden, and the scene begins to swell and to move and to float and to expand and is never afterwards to be forgotten” (MH/B9.k.2).

C: The “Freshwater Drafts”

During the next several years Woolf returned again and again to edit another set of drafts, in which prefatory remarks are eliminated and the telescope episode is placed within a narrative frame tale. Woolf called this group of drafts “Scenes from the Past.” There are six manuscript versions in this sequence, grouped together by J.W. Graham under the rubric of the “Freshwater drafts” (381). In January of 1939 Woolf noted that she was rewriting “the old Henry Taylor telescope story that’s been humming in my mind these 10 years” (D 5:204).

The frame tale, which contains events that take place during a day in Freshwater Bay in 1860, implicitly associates Taylor’s transforming telescope vision with Cameron’s camera by juxtaposition and parallel construction. A similar structure obtains in Between the Acts, in which the frame tale occurs in the present day and the players enact scenes from the past. The first sentence of the very first “Freshwater draft” begins,

‘It was not altogether a joke, sitting to Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron at Freshwater in the Sixties,’ Herbert Fisher tells us in his autobiography. That

---

103 Jane de Gay (2000) considers the Freshwater Drafts to be an independent story, not part of the drafts of “The Searchlight.” Whether this theory is correct or not, the series of drafts are concerned with vision, through the aid of a searchlight or a camera, and the playacting through which the vision is materialized. This indicates that Woolf was thinking about the transformational power of vision especially when combined with the assumption of roles.
casual remark serves to light up a scene in the same way as that of a
searchlight [prodding] the night for German raiders serves to make a little
island of light in the hall, to bring back a scene. (MH/B10.f.1)

H.A.L. Fisher was Cameron’s nephew, son of her sister Virginia Pattle Fisher, sister
of Florence Fisher (fig. 78), and father of Commander William Fisher of the H.M.S.
Dreadnought, Woolf’s first cousin, the butt of the Dreadnought Hoax. Woolf goes on to
describe how on this particular day Henry Taylor sits for Cameron posed as King Arthur
“draped in an Indian shawl pinned with a cameo brooch” (MH/B.10a-e). Perhaps Woolf
was influenced in this description by accounts of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s sitting for
Cameron in 1868, similarly wrapped in a shawl, having been brought to her studio and left
there by Tennyson with the admonitory words, “You will have to do whatever she tells you.
I will come back soon and see what is left of you” (Martin 469).

The description of the photographer’s outrageous behavior in the frame tale is right
out of Freshwater: Taylor is “menaced” into submission by Cameron. Before she steps away
for a moment to deal with the butcher, she “threatens” him with a “clenched fist” and
“eternal damnation” if he should move while she is gone. Indeed, this behavior is not unlike
other sitters’ accounts of what took place in Cameron’s studio: “we never knew what Aunt
Julia was going to do next, nor did any one else for the matter of that [...] once in her
clutches, we were perfectly helpless. ‘Stand there’, she shouted. And we stood for hours, if
necessary”, observed Laura Gurney Troubridge, Cameron’s great-niece.104 Ignoring
Cameron’s attempted tyranny, Taylor steps “rather guiltily” (page one) though the studio
doors with a young woman pianist – possibly Ellen Terry – to walk through the village of
Freshwater and on out to the Downs overlooking the Solent.

104 Quoted in the V&A introductory essay to the Cameron Collection:
The photographer’s studio is surrounded by hyper-romantic feats of nature in this version. The hollyhocks grow ten feet tall, and “when the moon rose, nightingales vociferated their eternal sorrow from trembling sprays.” During the time Taylor poses for his portrait, “the only sound that broke the melody of the Beethoven sonata was the boom of bees tunneling their way down the alabaster throats of arum lilies.” Woolf’s rhetoric mocks Keats’ nightingale and Tennyson’s “murmuring of innumerable bees” (a line from The Princess of which the poet was especially proud, and which Woolf spoofs in Freshwater). She goes further in her satire: it is the “amorous ecstasy” of the rooks, not nightingales, crying “Maud, Maud, Maud!” as they fly over Farringford woods next to Cameron’s studio that breaks the long silence of Taylor’s heart and enables him to confide his early telescope experience to the young woman.

Through gentle irony and exaggeration, prosaic Freshwater village itself is made to seem exotic and luxurious, “the shop windows [...] hardly restrained the mounds of butter and towers of innumerable eggs. Whole sides of beef, pink flanks of eviscerated pigs, wreathed with sausages, hung from hooks.” The local merchant Patty Catt, crying herring, causes the narrator to think it a scene from a Greek isle. “All this, and more -- infinitely more -- was Freshwater in the sixties” (page 2).

Posing for Cameron is still associated in Woolf’s mind with comical exaggeration, as it was in Freshwater. Herbert Fisher’s suggestion that the experience is “not altogether a joke,” raises the reader’s awareness through litotes and negative imagination that it is at least partially a joke to be Cameron’s sitter. His statement adds a humorous tone to this voluptuously described, romanticized setting for the story.

The role of Cameron’s King Arthur is somewhat outrageously invoked by Woolf and applied to Taylor in the Freshwater drafts. Arthur is Tennyson’s hero, a figure which Taylor never portrayed for Cameron. Taylor had sat for “multiform impersonations of King David,
King Lear, and all sorts of ‘Kings, Princes, Prelates, Potentates and Peers’” as Jane de Gay, quoting from Taylor’s *Autobiography* tells us (214). He would, in fact, have resented being asked to portray the leading heroic figure in his rival’s epic poem, though Mark Hussey suggests that Taylor appears as the King in the twelfth plate of the original *Victorian Photographs* book (Plate 12) “crowned in tinsel” (18) and dressed in brocade (fig. 79). He indeed appears distinguished and noble in this portrait, but there is no indication that the image is intended to illustrate King Arthur. The regal connotations of conflating Taylor with Tennyson as King of idyllic Freshwater would have furthered Woolf’s purposes by extending the mock-heroic, larger-than-life atmosphere she fostered in this draft. It also introduces Tennyson’s heroic king as a marker of civilization’s beginning and end.

Woolf connects the frame tale in Cameron’s studio with the original telescope anecdote by having Taylor describe his feelings of isolation and the galvanizing shock he felt at the sight of the embrace. His confession to the young woman who accompanies him that he “never knew a mother’s love” causes a dislocation in the tone of the story, introducing a note of irony. Past melancholy slides into melodrama in the frame tale, though Taylor’s maudlin statement elicits a warm and apparently sincere response from his companion. She calls out in pity: “Dear Sir Henry!” – identifying him for the first time in the story. Woolf awkwardly ends the narrative by noting that “It is left for our oblivious age to add ‘Taylor, Sir Henry, (1800-1886). Author of Philip Van Artevelde, Isaac Comnenus, and The Statesman...’.” These dry facts of Taylor’s history, written in a format more appropriate to her father’ magnum opus, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, shift the tone of the narrative again to a more serious, historian’s accounting.105

105 Leslie Stephen wrote the entry for Henry Taylor in his *Dictionary;* Woolf ended the story with a few excerpted facts about Taylor’s life as her father might have noted them, a striking contrast to the rich and colorful information she gives the reader about Taylor in the story (DNB London, Oxford, 1901 Vol. 55, 410-412).
Since the present, the age she is writing in, is “oblivious,” Woolf feels she must prove his greatness by mentioning three markers which have not survived. The story ends with tokens of Taylor’s personal achievement and his impact on history. She mentions a statue of Taylor, the fact that his name is in the ledger at the Colonial Office where he had served her grandfather, and his inclusion in Cameron’s album of photographs.

In the later versions of this draft’s ending, Woolf attempts to convey the vulnerability of Britain’s civilization to destruction through air attack in World War II, as if all Taylor’s previous experience and effort could ultimately be for naught, swiftly wiped out in a bombing raid: “the book in [which] the story is told, and the album in which you could see him draped in a shawl posed as King Arthur were destroyed only the other day by enemy action.” Three time levels are at work here. This destruction, which ends the story, takes place in the writerly present of 1941. The draft begins with Fisher’s remark, which was recorded in the present day, Fisher having in fact left an unfinished autobiography when he died in 1940 about events that had taken place in Freshwater in the previous century. Taylor’s original telescope incident occupies the earliest time level. He lived in Witten-le-Ware from 1818 to 1823. The next time zone is occupied by the scene in Cameron’s studio in the 1860’s. In the final version of the story, there is only the present and the distant past of two generations prior.

The events of the three ages do not harmonize in tone. In the tower in 1820, Taylor has an intensely personal and transformative visual confrontation with human passion. Life in Freshwater Bay is described with relaxed, luxurious hyperbole. Even with Fisher’s gentle mocking in the frame tale, the present is found lacking by comparison with the past; there is a nostalgic longing for the simplicity and sensuous innocence of wholehearted pursuits (photography, playing Beethoven sonatas, fishing, calling herring, good conversation, walks on the Downs) and the remarkable achievements taking place in Cameron’s studio.
Freshwater is presented as an idyllic place. The Victorians were blessedly ignorant of the possibility of destruction in the order of magnitude of the World Wars, Woolf seems to say, and were therefore able innocently to pursue greatness in oppressive colonialist careers, faux kingship, and second rate poetry. By the writing of “The Searchlight,” such complacency had disappeared from the earth forever.

The Freshwater drafts founder in their combination of many discordant elements. Woolf juxtaposes famous people from her family and from history – Cameron, Taylor, Fisher – and places like Freshwater Village, the Downs, and her great aunt’s glass house, with Taylor’s internal experience, his intensely private emotions and pivotal vision. The memory of Woolf’s family and their friends seem to come crowding in upon her from the past. She tries to blend disparate tones -- comedy and pathos, nostalgia and historical and political commentary, whimsical imagination and intensely earnest personal experience, which, mixed together, jar the reader’s sensibilities. Ultimately, Woolf falls back into a burlesque of her great aunt out of protective habit, a comic stance toward Cameron’s vision.

The difficulty with this series of drafts seems to arise from the author’s process of separating herself from her Victorian ancestors. She too had experienced pivotal moments like Henry Taylor’s, in which life intensified and expanded suddenly; the telescope story resonated with these, her own transformative turning points. She valued them profoundly and named them “moments of being,” describing them as sudden shocks of awareness, in which

I felt that I had made a discovery. I felt that I had put away in my mind something that I should go back [to], to turn over and explore […] I was conscious -- if only at a distance -- that I should in time explain it.

(MOB 71-72)
These moments of being were the true instances of living for Woolf, times when her vision pierced through what she called “the cotton wool of daily life [to] a revelation of some order [...] a token of some real thing behind appearances” (MOB 72), as if there were a “pattern” that could be discerned behind the everyday minutiae of life. Through practice, Woolf found she could make such a moment “real by putting it into words.” That is exactly what she does in the final version of “The Searchlight,” in which the narrator puts into words for her guests – and for us, her readers – her re-experienced memory, enacting it while relating it.

Woolf gave up on the Freshwater drafts finally, after explaining what she calls the “ghost” of a story or a poem, and how it can persist, mutably and actively for years after the book that contains it has been read.

When a body dies the ghost it is said sometimes haunts us. But when a book is read, and shut up and put away, what happens to that ghost? Some haunt us almost whole; poems for the most part; but the greater number fade, and not merely fade, but as they are blown about the corridors of the brain change, and mingle with other shapes, so that after some years they are scarcely recognizable. (MD/B10e)

In this draft, a young man, disappointed through a failed meeting with the woman he truly loves, takes a different, though quite satisfactory course through life. This story centers on another kind of chance – a mischance that closes off an avenue of romance, a choice which is not allowed to enhance the protagonist’s experience by granting him a transformative “moment of being.”
Woolf dropped this alternative plot of disappointment after one try, and picked up the telescope again to write the last draft, a streamlined version of the story, eliminating the historical connections and placing the story in a frame tale occurring in the immediate present between the wars. In its final form, the experience of vision is central and is reduplicated in the frame tale through the device of the searchlight. Cameron’s photography haunts the tale invisibly but importantly. The powerful experience of seeing from the tower is re-lived through acting it out by the narrator, to the captivation of her audience. In a meta-theatrical process, the vision’s effect also impacts the reader, who is entranced as it is related by the story’s narrative voice. The woman’s performance of her vision crosses the boundaries of generations, giving a sense of continuity to the original story, and adding a sense of the possibility of an unending series of ripples spreading out far into the future. The threat of imminent annihilation is forgotten and a community, if only for a moment, is born.

D: “The Searchlight”

In “The Searchlight,” the rubric given to the group of final five drafts, Woolf drops all reference to proper names. Henry Taylor, Herbert Fisher, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Freshwater disappear into a stripped-down parable about vision and theatre. The only person identified is the narrator, Mrs. Ivimey. “The Searchlight” begins with a frame tale, in which a group of Londoners are gathered on the balcony of a club (formerly the home of an eighteenth century earl) to enjoy after dinner coffee before going to the theatre. The reader and theatre guests have been put in a relaxed, receptive mood, expecting some sort of entertainment. The momentary reflection of a searchlight beam in a pocket mirror causes their hostess, Mrs. Ivimey, to remember a scene from the distant past – and to exclaim,
“You’ll never guess what that made me see!” (SF 263). She visualizes a scene in her mind and then acts it out for her guests. It is the image of a couple embracing which her great grandfather had described to her many years before. She relates an amended version of the anecdote of the telescope. In her version, her grandfather, playing the role Henry Taylor played in earlier drafts, runs down the tower and goes to find the young woman he has spied wrapped in a passionate embrace.

Mrs. Ivimey tells the tale with such intensity that she and her audience forget themselves and identify with the nameless viewer, feeling as if they have been transported back to relive the pivotal scene of passion. The telescope “illuminates” the previously invisible lives it frames in its lens in a way analogous to the searchlight capturing aircraft in its beam. In the story the searchlight duplicates the action of the telescope as it “captures” the narrator:

A shaft of light fell upon Mrs. Ivimey as if someone had focussed the lens of a telescope upon her. (It was the air force, looking for enemy air craft.) She had risen. She had something blue on her head. She had raised her hand, as if she stood in a doorway, amazed.

‘Oh the girl... She was my’- she hesitated, as if she were about to say ‘myself’. But she remembered; and corrected herself. ‘She was my great grandmother,’ she said.

(SF 266)

Discovering an image through a telescope or searchlight is thus made an analogue to discovering an image through Cameron’s camera. They are collapsed into one visual medium, though the searchlight emits light and the telescope’s lens allows one to see at a great distance – only the camera preserves a post card from the stage. It captures the history of the country and the family. This is the first time Woolf writes about an image invoking her great aunt without lapsing into hyperbole or comedy. Henry Taylor’s experience is described with delicate empathy in this version; it is also enacted earnestly by
his putative great-granddaughter with a sense of renewed appreciation and wonder. Mrs. Ivimey’s vision, acted out in performance, has its counterpart in Cameron’s dramatic tableaux, especially in her book containing the scenes of King Arthur and other heroes.

The performance of a play disappears after the curtain falls, except insofar as it lives on in the memory of the audience, in images of its fleeting instants. In her essay “Ellen Terry”, written concurrently with the final drafts of “The Searchlight,” Woolf describes the process:

It is the fate of actors to leave only picture postcards behind them. Every night when the curtain goes down the beautiful coloured canvas is rubbed out. What remains is at best only a wavering, insubstantial phantom -- a verbal life on the lips of the living.

(CE 4: 67)

Mrs. Ivimey enables her guests on the balcony to see the “beautiful coloured canvas” of her great-grandfather’s experience through her own “verbal life on the lips of the living.” The image is rubbed out briefly when words spoken in an irrelevant nearby conversation break the spell in the midst of the story, causing part of the assembled group to wake for an instant from their trance to become aware of the pre-theatre present gathering on the balcony.

Undaunted, Mrs. Ivimey continues telling her story, and while performing it loses herself and becomes an incarnation of her great-grandmother. The role of the Victorian woman lies within her as an “unacted part” (BTA 153), an available role she had previously been unaware of. She is transported back in time through telling the story, transformed by her vision just as her great uncle had been by the vision he saw through the telescope.
While experiencing this transformation herself through her protagonist, Woolf eradicates the boundaries between her own and the Pattles’ generation. She becomes able to feel her great aunt’s creative excitement intimately: through retelling the tale in a contemporary setting she experiences what it would have been like for Cameron to focus through a lens on a scene filled with emotion and capture it, reenacting it for others. She, like her great aunt, creates each scene in her imagination, and “make[s] it real by putting it into words” (MOB 72); Cameron conveyed her vision’s reality through the creation of imagined scenes inherited from the past and created by the people who acted them. The dramatic performance put on by the hostess, Mrs. Ivimey, in which she enacts her great-grandmother’s surprise when the searchlight illuminates her, creates a “postcard” like those Cameron sent from the peaceful nineteenth century to the war-torn twentieth.

Woolf herself serves as a kind of “hostess” for her audience of readers, like Mrs. Ivimey; her writing is a performance into which she enters for the momentary transformation of herself and her readers. In managing a cast of characters, Woolf played Cameron’s part for her reader – it must have been a comfort for her in 1939 to think of her writing as a theatrical event rather than as lines written alone in her writing room. She had gained a deeper appreciation of the communal aspects of the drama with all its inherent problems and limitations. By eliminating the historical Cameron from “The Searchlight,” Woolf was better able to identify with her Victorian great aunt, rather than distancing herself from Cameron through humor, as she had done in the past. Eradicating the specificities of historical names and places allowed her to universalize the story, removing impediments for the reader in identifying with the group on the balcony, the teller of the story, and the great-grandparents as they experienced the shock of their first meeting.

Woolf tells us that the searchlight of her story is part of the British army’s peacetime defensive maneuver of practicing a protective “prodding” of the night in order to discover
hidden aircraft that might be menacing the citizens of London. In the narrative as it unfolds, the searchlight is a tool of discovery and imagination. It is as if “The Searchlight” were written to demonstrate the operation of those “two immensely valuable searchlights” of fact and imagination that Woolf had identified in her typescript draft of *A Room of One’s Own*, working “side by side” to help us to “see what has never yet been seen” (1992, 72), providing deep insights into human experience. In “The Searchlight” they operate in community.

A visual aid, the searchlight is a tool of memory, fact, and imagination similar to a telescope and a camera in the evolution of the short story. As Cameron had done in writing about her lens, Woolf anthropomorphizes it. In the draft of her essay, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” – published while she was working on *Between the Acts* (CE 4: 173), she describes how a searchlight “fingers” the clouds. By their prodding and fingering, the double searchlights illuminate scenes, enabling the writer to find words capable of expanding and transforming facts into art. Thus the searchlight, telescope, and camera lens are metaphors for sharing transcendent experiences. However, the successful illumination of a transformative creative moment, which Woolf has described as its elevation from ordinary life to a “moment of being” – imparting a shock of instant understanding and vision – is a gift not always available, for, as Mrs. Ivimey observes in the penultimate paragraph of the story, “‘The light [...] only falls here and there’” (266).

---

106 First published in 1940 in *The New Republic*. The typescript draft of this essay is held at the Harry Ransom Research Center in Austin, TX.
Chapter Three

Arthur and the Theatre of Anon

Before examining the photographs from Cameron’s book of Illustrations, as this project goes on to do in the last two chapters, Chapter Three addresses the two iconic figures around whom this project is organized: King Arthur and Anon. Both are cultural leaders of British history, each defined and enfleshed colorfully through accretions of the literary imagination over time. Divided into four parts, this chapter begins by addressing the ways Arthurian chivalry influenced Britain over the centuries, focusing on its influence and expression in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. The portrait of King Arthur that Woolf shows Cameron about to make in her studio in the drafts of “The Searchlight” stands as a metonym for British culture while illustrating the importance of vision, especially vision in memory, as a pivotal experience.

This chapter traces several links between the Illustrations and Woolf’s evolving thought. It considers how Cameron’s Illustrations, by re-envisioning the Laureate’s poetry in a new medium, contributed to Woolf’s evolving concept of the figure of Anon and the importance of community theatre. Woolf’s answer to the domination of threatening forms of chivalry, in which she found the roots of fascism and war, was the community theatre: for her La Trobe’s pageant was a parable of creative democracy representing an artistic genre capable of standing up to the ancient and influential concept of chivalry expressed through the Idylls”“parabolic drift.” The Illustrations likely inhabited Woolf’s unconscious as an
afterimage, initiating a redemptive process which issued in her “reconstellation” or actual visual reconceptualization of Arthurian chivalry. Rather than supporting the dominant British ideology, her Illustrations revised versions of Tennyson’s Arthuriad and other poems, turning them into scenes in the pageant of English literary history, and opening them to wider interpretations. In an earlier essay she called “The Moment,” Woolf observed that “we are spectators and passive participants in a pageant” (CE 2: 293). By 1940 she had adopted the pageant as a metaphor for life. In Between the Acts, the characteristics of the pageant as a genre allowed Woolf the opportunity to re-present a collaborative history as satire as well as celebration.

The Influence of Arthurian Chivalry

Vision in “The Searchlight”

In "The Searchlight" and its drafts lie the seeds of ideas more fully developed in Woolf’s later writing, linking it to Cameron and the Illustrations. Writing the story spurred Woolf to examine creativity in a new light, relating it to the power of vision, performance, and transformative moments. She worked on serial versions of the searchlight story for twelve years (1929-1941), developing it through ten drafts – from the initial story of Taylor’s telescopic epiphany to the performance of a pivotal moment of vision for contemporary Londoners nearly a century later. The writing of her play Freshwater similarly spanned a dozen years: first conceived in 1919, it was ultimately performed in
1935. Cameron occupied Woolf's imagination from the late twenties till her death in 1941 at fifty-nine.

The moment of vision illuminated by the searchlight in the story is photographic. It captures and frames the narrative at its most intense moment. It also takes its viewers in a brief journey from the present moment into a different time and place. Like Mrs. Ivimey in "The Searchlight," the playwright La Trobe in Between the Acts conveys her vision to the audience, offering them an escape from the present moment through the imagination, observing that "[a] vision imparted was relief from agony" (BTA 98). In her enactment of the story, Mrs. Ivimey entrances her audience with a vision of the past, as does Cameron in her tableaux. The photographic Illustrations and novel’s pageant scenes portray visions of a shared literary heritage familiar to their audiences.

The photos are all that remain of the performances Cameron staged at Freshwater, of both her amateur theatricals and her tableaux vivants – the images constitute the "final act" of Cameron's career, completed just prior to her departure for Ceylon. These moments in which the imagination triumphed were of great importance to her, holding a reality that in their way came to seem more real than daily life. In her essay "Ellen Terry," Woolf describes the magic of life in the theatre, expressed in Terry's paradoxical words. She deems the "'life lived in houses – sham – cold – hard – pretending. It's not sham here in our theatre – here all is real, warm and kind – we live a lovely spiritual life here'" (CE 4: 68-9). Woolf had come to associate the theatrical arts of La Trobe and her great aunt with what she knew in life to be "spiritual," "real, warm, and kind."
The King Who Never Was: Henry Taylor as King Arthur

In the Freshwater drafts of “The Searchlight,” Taylor poses as King Arthur for Cameron, producing a portrait which, the narrator tells us, has been destroyed in a bombing raid just prior to the story’s writing. It is the image of Tennyson’s King Arthur, the founder of Britain, which provides the organizational spine for seven of Woolf’s ten Freshwater drafts.

The time frames of the Freshwater drafts are connected through serial images of Henry Taylor as a young man with a telescope, a mature poet in Cameron’s studio, and ultimately an emblem of British civilization, as he models for the portrait of King Arthur. Two of the three time levels in these drafts are concerned with Cameron’s photograph of Taylor: created in the nineteenth-century in her studio, it is destroyed in the present time, the age in which the story is told. The tower telescope incident of the story becomes less important in these drafts, a non-Arthurian episode occurring in the distant past of Taylor’s youth, demonstrating his initial transformative vision. The vision Cameron sees through her camera – of Taylor as King Arthur – seems the inevitable outcome of the moment that inspired him to go out into the world seeking to experience life. The view through the telescope is now bookended in the narrative by the photo’s creation at the story’s outset and its destruction at the end. Taylor’s mature image frames the story, appearing in the persona of the grizzled, pensive sage in the portrait Woolf chose for her book Victorian.

107 Though absent in her work from 1906 on, King Arthur appears, several times in the Monks House papers, in a sheaf of pages Woolf was working on in the year of her death. He is mentioned numerous times in Anon, as well as in “Concerning Ellen Terry” MH/B5.a, page 6; and the Searchlight drafts: “A Scene from the Past” MH/B10.e, draft 1:page 3, draft 2:page 5, draft 3:page 4; “The Telescope” draft 1:page 4; draft 2:page 5; and draft 3:page 5.
Thus the Freshwater drafts encompass the chronicle of English history and civilization; beginning with an homage to Britain’s first king, reigning in the sixth century, and ending with the Second World War’s destruction of his image in a bombing raid. The photograph is the nineteenth-century embodiment of a hero who lived more than a millennium prior to the story’s twentieth-century telling, his image preserved through a newly-developed technology. Its obliteration underscores the fragility of civilization in the face of fast-paced technology: the photo that took Cameron many hours to plan, execute, and develop, is destroyed in an instant by a bomb.

Woolf created the image of Henry Taylor as King Arthur in her imagination: Taylor never actually sat for that role. The “noble,” “thought-plowed, eagle-eyed, august” sage that she describes in the story’s drafts (“A Scene from the Past” MH/B10.e) evokes Taylor’s portrait in *Victorian Photographs*, but bears no resemblance to Cameron’s photographic renderings of King Arthur. Both of the portraits of him in the *Illustrations* (figs. 24 & 28) show Arthur as a much younger man – a role enacted by William Warder, the porter of Yarmouth Pier. The legendary Arthur was supposed to have been in his mid-thirties when he died in battle, not sixty-five, as Taylor was when he sat for the portrait in *Victorian Photographs*. Anyway, Taylor would have objected strenuously to Cameron’s attempts to turn him into Tennyson’s Arthur, had she indeed tried.

The photograph of Taylor as Arthur is a precious commodity in the story. It represents some of the most prized values that evolved in British civilization over the twelve hundred years following Arthur’s death; its loss demonstrates the imminent and devastating potential of war. Arthur is irretrievably identified with Britain. His story

---

108 Mark Hussey suggests that this is the photograph Woolf has in mind in the story (1995, 251). Taylor had worked in the Colonial Office under Woolf’s grandfather, Sir James Stephen.

109 See Julian Cox’s catalog raisonné, pps.346-353, Figs. 761-790 for all known Cameron photos of Taylor.
initiates the history of the British Isles; he united its disparate tribes and his putative code of conduct has held them together ever since.

Cameron’s only published book encompasses Tennyson’s Arthuriad. Her choice of subjects to illustrate – the Laureate’s poetry and the Arthurian legends – make her book a quintessential expression of British Victorian culture, historically, ideologically and artistically, with links both to the past and the future. By choosing to represent Tennyson’s Arthuriad as she did in the Illustrations, Cameron was in effect rewriting British history.

**Arthur as England’s National Myth**

In the nineteenth century, a time of great upheaval, when the stable self was under attack from many quarters, it was reassuring to Victorians to find leadership in the lives of heroes whom they knew they could rely upon to provide a sense of continuity and inspiration. Through their life stories the British public could approach the future with hope and security, discovering and developing similarly heroic qualities within themselves. The oldest of these heroes was Arthur, understood as an historical person who embodied the highest ideals of chivalry – a shining example of what British character could be.

Challenges to the belief in absolutes brought on by industrialization and its attendant ills, the contraction of the Empire, conflicts abroad, and scientific discoveries overturning received ideas at home, all jarred British confidence, security, and peace of mind, motivating the desire for heroic inspiration.

Historians Stephanie Barczewski, Inga Bryden, and Patricia Ingham have described ways in which the Arthurian legends were crucial to the formation of British national
identity in the nineteenth century. They explain the evolution of Arthur’s story and how it unified the community, furnishing Britons with a history and a legacy. Their explanation of national identity and unity raises questions similar to those Nietzsche harbored, echoed by Woolf, concerning the construction of historical “truth” as a dramatic creation. Like many current historians, Barczewski supports Woolf’s belief that history is at least partially an imaginative creation:

In recent years scholars have increasingly come to argue that national consciousness comes into being through narratives that erase contradictions, defuse paradoxes and fill in discursive gaps, thereby transforming the often tempestuous creation of a national identity into a logical, linear, seemingly inevitable process. In other words, every nation requires a ‘national history’ in which the community’s evolution and existence is explained and validated; history not only creates nations, but nations also create their own histories. (45)

Historical narration is a way of enriching and ordering facts that “reflects the effort to ease the trauma of dislocation by weaving scattered events into a seamless web” observes Mark Taylor (71). The story of Arthur helped repair the gaps and inconsistencies presented by objective facts and instituted a political theology that gave Britain a king who could never die, whose very body was deeply identified with the land itself. Arthur’s “body” of legends was etched into the British national consciousness so deeply that it had the power to govern the country’s character and direction, especially during times of conflict and national crisis. Among the great heroes of the past to whom the British public looked as founders of the nation, Arthur was for many the foremost. Published in 1885 and

In The Use and Abuse of History (1874), Nietzsche had challenged history’s authority, legitimacy, and linearity. Woolf attempted a project to overturn the totalizing, monolithic, traditionally masculine writing of history, just as Cameron challenged the traditionally male-gendered gaze of photography.

Cf. Ernst Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies, Princeton, Princeton UP 1957
edited by Leslie Stephen, Volume Two of the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* contains a biographical sketch of King Arthur that describes him as the “[r]eal or fabulous first king of Britain and a favorite hero of romantic literature from the middle ages down to our own days […]” (II:582: entry written by Charles Francis Keary). The country’s first king and unifier, Arthur was revered as its originary national hero, the Ur-representative of the superiority of the British people. He was endowed with qualities that would insure British survival and growth.

A constant presence in the British imagination, Arthur became a particularly attractive hero in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as witnessed by the numerous literary works written about him at that time. He was seen to be a noble leader willing to give up his life for his country’s glorious cause. In 1849 Sharpe’s *London Journal* described him as “the beautiful incarnation of all the best characteristics of our nation” (9:374). According to British national legend, it was Arthur who first ruled England’s green and pleasant land and created the “precious stone set in the silver sea.” An unconsciously accepted part of British life, Arthur’s legendary presence was continued and expressed in the character of its people. His story constituted the first chapter of British history and his biography introduced a pattern for Britain’s great male heroes.\(^\text{113}\)

Arthurian legends were widespread across Europe from the Middle Ages on. They evolved through the centuries, influenced repeatedly by the culture of whichever invading tribe happened to be dominant, constantly altered in the reiterated performances of the troubadours who traveled the country extolling them. Britain, surrounded by a watery moat, had fewer foreign invaders than did countries on the landlocked continent, insuring...

\(^{113}\) In *Jacob’s Room* the narratorial voice tells us that Jacob has written a paper titled “Does history consist of the biography of great men?” – in response to Carlyle’s belief expressed in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in Our Time* that “the history of the world is but the biography of great men” -- a subject that occupied Woolf, given her father’s accomplishments as editor of the DNB. *Jacob’s Room* itself is written as if seen through a camera lens, from various angles.
that the British Arthurian legends remained more stable than those of France and Germany, thus fostering a sense of British ownership of the literature.

**Arthur Performed by Anon**

There is no identifiably first or “original” version of the oral Arthurian myths, no complete early cycle. They were made up over centuries of recitations and altered with each performance. Some material was inevitably eliminated and lost and many embellishments added through the centuries. Due to attrition, accretion, audience response, and imperfect iterations, the legends became a kind of living Rorschach mirror of each age: Arthur was constantly reincarnated in the image of his audience, an image that evolved steadily over the years. He appears at times to have competed in popularity with the biblical story of Christ.\(^\text{114}\) Performed by troubadours, the Arthurian legends were a community expression, a vital work in progress created in concert by the performers and their audience. Woolf valued their early fluid quality, about which she was theorizing in *Anon* and *The Reader* at the time of her death. She saw the legends as a group collaboration, with Anon as their spokesperson, articulating history for the communities in which they were performed. Each version adopted elements from its predecessors, blending them with its particular story line and character development, expressing the unspoken insight and emotion of the time. Through their present-moment performance, the stories of “our island history” (BTA 76), collapsed time.

\(^\text{114}\) Priests and ministers at one point found it advisable to warn their parishioners against supplanting attention to Christ with devotion to Arthur, cf. Richard Barber’s anthology *The Arthurian Legends*, which traces the plasticity and mirroring qualities possessed by the legends across centuries.
Much of the pliable, living sense that performance lent to the Arthurian legends ended in 1485, according to Woolf (Anon 384), when, as she claims, William Caxton printed Sir Thomas Malory's version of the Arthurian legends, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Transcribing it from the oral culture, Malory's *Morte* froze Arthurian lore through Caxton's publication of it, initiating the culture of literacy in England, but killing the intimate literary performance of the legends by troubadours. In the nineteenth century, the *Idylls of the King* presented a revised Victorian version of Arthur's kingdom. According to Tennyson, Camelot was built to music, “[…] therefore never built at all, / And therefore built for ever” (Ricks 3:289, ll.272-273). But the music was Tennyson’s verse on the page, no longer the voice of the traveling troubadour. Each reader would now be responsible for sounding the music inwardly while reading the *Idylls*. For Woolf, transposing the music of Arthurian legend from the balladeer to the page vitiated its powerful effect as a performance that could connect audience to actor in an intimate bond.

With Malory in print, Arthur’s stories became codified and were no longer as readily open to the imaginative additions or emendations of the past. Cameron’s photographic performance of the *Idylls* paradoxically lifts them out of the printed book and, by returning them to performance art, offers a new theatrical experience to the viewer. Her serial photographic tableaux provide a visual chronicle of Arthur representing both a move into the future of technological production and a simultaneous return to an earlier stage of acting out the Arthurian lais, a combination of ancient with new media.

---

115 Woolf notes several different dates for the publication of *Le Morte d'Arthur*; for ease of reference I have adopted 1485, since it is the date she most often used in “Anon.” The first book printed in England is now widely accepted to be Caxton’s printing of the *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, published on November 18, 1477 (Cambridge History of English and American Literature. Vol 2, XIII.4, www.bartleby.com212/1304.html, accessed 10.13.07)
Arthur on the Page

Though the exploits of Arthur and his kingdom were not transcribed until the tenth century, four hundred years after the generally accepted date of his death, many versions of “the Matter of Britain” were written shortly after that, the earliest three being accounts by Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the anonymous author of the *Mabinogion*. The two most influential versions of the Arthurian legends written in English came later. These are considered to be Thomas Malory’s fifteenth-century *Le Morte d’Arthur* and Tennyson’s Victorian *Idylls of the King*, both widely published and in print today.

Little documentation of Arthur’s existence survives from the turn of the sixth century, the period in which he is said to have lived: it was a time of cultural blackout, a gap in history that has invited later writers and artists to fill it with imaginative flourishes, creating a Camelot composed of fantasy projections, most of them anachronistic reflections of their creators’ historical period. The character of Arthur is portrayed differently in each version of the legends. He tends to be a shape-shifter who reflects the culture of the time and place in which his chronicles are retold. The roustabout king of *Le Morte d’Arthur* reflects the mores of fifteenth-century England. Malory’s robust and outrageous temperament permeates the story of his King, in marked contrast to Tennyson’s Arthur, “the apotheosis of chivalry,” whose tale is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century, portraying him as “a troubled Victorian gentleman at the heart of a middle-class national epic” (Gilmour 50).

The story of Arthur, England’s foundational myth, has attracted artists, sculptors, playwrights, poets, and novelists for over fourteen hundred years. Milton first considered writing about Arthur and Camelot as the subject of his great epic, but chose instead the story of Adam and Eve – the Ur-text that underlies the fall of Camelot, the story of how
Guinevere, like Eve, yielded to temptation and lost the kingdom. Shakespeare, who used Nennius as a source for *King Lear*, chose not to dramatize Nennius’s story of Arthur, but instead situated his history plays much later: beginning with the reign of kings after the Norman invasion.\textsuperscript{116}

**The Once and Future King:**

**Chivalry in the Twentieth Century**

The devastation of the Great War was followed by a second world conflagration which threatened to destroy British civilization. By then the invention and prevalence of the airplane had made invasion of Britain, previously protected by its watery moat, seem almost inevitable. Living with this imminent threat encouraged Britons to seek the comfort of old legends as reassuring narratives of origin, identity, and excellence of character. The story of Arthur and Camelot offered the nation a parable of self-sacrificing national leadership imbued with a noble code of conduct to be employed in the work of creating order out of incipient chaos.

Tennyson had described ancient Britain as a land in which there were “great tracts of wilderness/ Wherein the beast was ever more and more, / But man was less and less till Arthur came” (Ricks 3: 267, ll. 10-12). Arthur was seen as a savior who was capable of rescuing Britain, albeit temporarily, from disorder. The Middle Ages, as Alice Chandler has aptly noted, were longingly conceptualized in the Victorian imagination as “a dream of order,” the industrial revolution having arrived in nineteenth-century England with the

\textsuperscript{116} Recently, Arthur Phillips has taken advantage of the absence of King Arthur in Shakespeare’s canon to write the missing play, *The Tragedy of Arthur*, an “original” Shakespearean manuscript, and use it as the centerpiece for his multi-layered, contemporary novel, raising questions of authenticity, relevance, heroes, and the idea of the author.
impact of a disease. In response, the foundational concepts of the Gothic revival suggested a redemptive return to a time preceding industrialization.

In the twentieth century, with civilization under siege from without, England’s felt need for an Arthurian hero intensified. An idealized version of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was formulated by the English imagination, and though it focused on a brief moment in Arthur’s story, had become an unconsciously accepted part of the national character. Chivalry provided an always-available heroic script and a standard of apparent moral excellence in the mind of Britons, which could be romanticized as a goal. It had increased power due to its religious significance – chivalry had originally drawn power from being associated with Christian typology, in which Arthur was seen as a type of Christ. Through the chivalric doctrine of courtly love women were to be venerated as potential versions of Mary.

As a code, the character of Arthur offered an ideal against which to measure the formation of national character in the home and in public, as well as through organizations as disparate as scouting and nurse’s training. Chivalry provided a clear and steady path, dispelling confusion and offering a definitive model of behavior that was a comforting and familiar role for every man and woman.

Woolf’s Solution to the Problem of Camelot

The social and political arrangement of legendary Camelot, the court over which Arthur reigned as heroic sovereign, represented numerous abuses to Woolf – chief among them was its aristocratically-inflected, hierarchical organization and the way it fostered
competition and the drive for distinction among men, which she felt was an important cause of oppression and war. Gender roles scripted by the code of chivalry polarized the behavior expected of men and women. Though ostensibly elevating a woman by placing her on a pedestal to be worshipped through the dictates of courtly love, chivalry effectively objectified and rendered women powerless by its insistence on a supposedly innate female need for male protection. Famously, marriage and caregiving were urged as the most suitable professions for women. Woolf expressed these views in her writing as we shall see, especially in *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas* and *The Pargiters*.

Her last novel offers a creative solution to the inequities of this societal arrangement, suggesting a paradigm at which Woolf arrived after having spent much of her career trying to imagine and sponsor an egalitarian society that could replace the conservative, patriarchal one that Britain had inherited from its distant past. Her ideal society was a rather utopian arrangement in which each member would have a voice, regardless of gender or social status. In contrast to the conservative, hierarchical organization of Camelot, she envisioned a society based on equal, mutual, and reciprocal relationships among all. She found her paradigm for this democratic arrangement in the relationship among the playwright, players, and audience members in the community theatre. The co-creation of each unique performance through the collaboration of individual actors and members of the audience promoted personal freedom, while at the same time uniting every participant in the artistic experience. Through the power of the imagination, art could lift the community to a new level not available to the individual alone.

---

117 Courtly love was encouraged by the culture as practice for the perfection of a man’s love of the divine. For Petrarch and Dante, for example, adoration of Laura and Beatrice was not idolatry but a tool enabling the poet to love God with more devotion and purity. The earthly love of a woman was a stop along the way that offered the poet practice (cf. Stanley Fish, *The Self-Consuming Artifact*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP 1998). The versions of the Arthurian legends by Chretien de Troyes and Gottfried von Strassbourg reflect the widespread popularity of Arthur as a subject for troubadours’ performance on the Continent; Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World* is the Ur-text for this theory.
An important social component of the Gothic revival's recuperation of feudalism in the nineteenth century was the sense of noblesse oblige that it imposed on the entitled. This idealistic principle involved an unwritten code of responsibility to those less fortunate, to be borne by the privileged classes. The Young England and Christian Socialist movements, which sprang from the revival of feudalism, required a tacit commitment from the well-off to take care of the working classes and the disadvantaged. The essentially Tory organizations that adhered to chivalry as a code shouldered the romanticized responsibility of spreading the gift of British culture abroad, as well as reinforcing it at home in accord with the movement's philosophical rationale for imperialism, inspired by the legendary Grail quest (Girouard 1981, 82-5).

In the twentieth century, organizations such as scouting aimed at forming the character of young people along chivalric values. The advantages of this system were especially attractive in time of war, when the country had regressed psychologically under stress, and looked to a strong model in a long-established order that seemed quintessentially British. This longing was powered by nostalgia for an idealized medieval past that had in actuality never existed.

Woolf was aware of these regressive tendencies and, being ideologically opposed to neo-feudal theory and practice, appealed to the archetypal artist she called "Anon" as a leader who was an antidote to Arthur. More than his counterpart, Anon was a persona large enough to encompass Arthur's story and subsume it in the performance of her pageant-play of history.

---

118 Chivalry’s appeal to the aristocratic, conservative, and pious Christian character is made clear in a comparison of Arthur as a national hero with Robin Hood, the populist British hero and outlaw, whose subversive acts undermined the rule of the land, though they too benefited the poor and needy. Stephanie Barczewski’s excellent Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain addresses the comparison between these two heroes.
In Woolf’s ideally organized society, every voice would be heard from every part of society, and the creative uniqueness of every life would be chronicled in the annals of history. Both the frame tale and the pageant at the center of Between the Acts demonstrate the social interdependence between the manor house and the village, enacting the coming together of the gentry, aristocracy, and lower classes to create, unite, and be transformed by art.119 The pageant is staged out of doors, which enables it to embrace the natural environment as well as the human as part of the theatrical performance. Though none of these conjunctions happens without complication, the overarching sense of La Trobe’s production in the novel is all inclusive.

The Military Hero of Three Guineas

Two years before Woolf wrote the Freshwater drafts of “The Searchlight,” describing Henry Taylor's sitting for Cameron as King Arthur, the emblem of British civilization, she published her anti-war polemic Three Guineas, containing the photograph of another military leader, General Robert Baden-Powell (fig. 80). A dedicated advocate of chivalric principles, Baden-Powell’s career functioned as a cautionary tale for Woolf, illustrating how these principles, put into practice, could issue in disastrous effects. Three Guineas was published as a photographically illustrated book, in some respects a commentary on Cameron’s photo-text.120 Woolf used the portrait of Baden-Powell as the generic illustration of a war criminal.

119 At first Woolf believed that the institution of an universal income tax and the availability of the public library would be society’s great equalizers, but she soon realized the cure would have to come from a deeper source. 120 Woolf’s photographs in Orlando and Flush are of a lighthearted nature.
The threat of war was an ever-present concern for Woolf, especially in her last years, during which she wrote about its cause and the possible ways in which it could be prevented. Photography played a role in Woolf’s protest writing. She had previously included photographs as illustrations in the novels Orlando and Flush, but photographs serve a different purpose in her chief anti-war argument, Three Guineas, which was itself written in response to the photographs of ruined buildings and dead bodies sent to her from the Spanish government along with its request for support in the Civil War effort (TG 11). The war in Spain was especially distressing for Woolf, as her nephew Julian Bell had recently gone to fight in it. She refused to reprint the devastating photos of war damage; she felt that doing so would give pride of place to images of violence, thus honoring the evil she wanted to eradicate. She chose instead to publicize what she felt was the true cause of war by displaying images of the social and political inequalities that resulted from patriarchy. The five photos included in Three Guineas are illustrations of the “sartorial splendor of the educated man” (TG 21). Members of the ruling class, these were the men whom she felt fostered war. Woolf further distinguishes Baden-Powell (fig. 80) among this group by noting that the finest clothing – denoting the highest distinction – was worn by officers in the military.

Cameron also did not publish images of violence, though she similarly features portraits of men in distinctive garb, such as Arthur and his knights, in her Illustrations. She rented a suit of chain mail and acquired some helmets so she could suggest Arthur’s readiness for battle in her two portraits of him (figs. 24 & 28), but took no pictures of military combat. The chain mail he wears in Cameron’s photos would not have afforded Arthur much protection, had he actually engaged Modred in combat, but that was not the

---

121 Julian was to die in Spain in 1939, the year after the publication of Three Guineas, at the age of twenty-nine.
point: she strove to create aesthetically pleasing portraits of the King, not accurate representations of Arthur as a military hero. The verse excerpt that accompanies the first portrait of Arthur ends with the King going to his last battle, “ghostlike to his doom.” The second portrait is accompanied by Tennyson’s stage direction indicating that Arthur “made at the man...” The images evoke an atmosphere of kingliness, but they show a pensive Arthur, neither a ghostly nor a warlike hero about to attack. According to J.M. Gray in Thro’ the Vision of the Night, there are more episodes of battle than interludes of romance in Tennyson’s Idylls, though no images of violence appear in Cameron’s Illustrations.

In Three Guineas, Woolf presents a series of photographs forming a costumed procession of distinguished, but unidentified, male provocateurs: a general, an archbishop, royal heralds blowing their trumpets, a judge, and a procession of academics at Cambridge. All are arrayed in full regalia. In the accompanying text Woolf proposes that all honors advertised by men’s official clothing be refused on the grounds that the distinctions between people created by such honors incite “feelings that lead to war” (TG 21).

Surprisingly, the five photos of distinguished men that appeared in the original 1938 edition of Three Guineas were left out of succeeding editions of the book until 2006, when an annotated edition was published with the photographs restored. Thus the point that Woolf tried to make by replacing the repressed Spanish Civil War photographs with the photographic “procession of elite men” she considered war criminals was lost to her readers for several decades. Though not a clear analogue of Woolf’s procession of decorated

---

122 Cameron went to lengths costuming Arthur. He wears different head gear in each photo, and a fabric wrap over the chain mail in place of a suit of armor. Interestingly, the photo is sharply focused, though Tennyson’s lines would indicate a gray, blurry focus for Arthur’s ghostlike appearance in the poetic passage that accompanies the photograph. She reuses the costumes in the death of Elaine sequence, when the barge floats into Arthur’s court.

123 Three Guineas, edited, annotated, and with an introduction by Jane Marcus. NY: Harcourt Brace, 2006. It may not have been an accident that this edition appeared a few years after Susan Sontag drew attention to the photographs Woolf received from the Spanish government by discussing them in Regarding the Pain of Others.
men, Cameron’s *Illustrations* show dressed-up men from Tennyson’s poems – an assortment of rulers from various countries and eras sporting wardrobes of distinction conferred by patriarchal society.

The photographs in the *Illustrations* and *Three Guineas*, as well as the scenes in La Trobe’s pageant in *Between the Acts*, suggest an alternative organization to England’s hierarchical society, not so much through their literary content as by their form. The mixed-up, haphazard procession of male elites in *Three Guineas* and disordered Tennysonian photographs of the *Illustrations*, like the disorderly, interrupted scenes from the novel’s pageant, conceptualize the past as a series of discrete episodes, each one complete in itself, each a small part of British culture, able to be addressed individually, critiqued, and incorporated into a larger whole. All aspects of human life have a place in the pageant; no single one dominates it.

Robert Baden-Powell and the Transmogrification of Arthur

Almost all of the five photos of dressed-up men in *Three Guineas* are portraits of men of the time who were well enough known to be recognized, men whom Woolf had targeted for their highly influential place in society. Leading the pageant, as noted above, is the frail, elderly, but highly-decorated Lieut.-General, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, K.C.B. (fig. 79, TG 2006, 25). As the man who masterminded a pivotal battle of the Empire, General Baden-Powell is the epitome of the twentieth-century British war hero.
In his book *The Character Factory*, Michael Rosenthal discusses Baden-Powell’s illustrious military career and the far-reaching effects of the Boy Scouts, the youth movement he founded. Scouting, today still a powerful world-wide influence, was based by Baden-Powell on a code of behavior derived from a Victorian understanding of chivalric Arthurian values. As Rosenthal observes, “Baden-Powell’s response to the social pathologies of postindustrial Britain was to return to the mythical world of heroic chivalry and those virtues of loyalty and discipline he felt would best guarantee national harmony” (280). Like Arthur, Baden-Powell believed in the power of obedient loyalty to solve social conflict. But Baden-Powell’s theory was manipulative: chivalric principles could be used in the interest of the ruling class to control the rest of society and prevent uprisings. As discussed in Chapter Two, blind adherence to a knightly code had caused the destruction of six hundred obedient cavalry troops in the Battle of Balaclava. Woolf was of the opinion that adherence to chivalric sentiment had also encouraged soldiers in World War I to agree to participate enthusiastically and without question in their own destruction.

After the Crimean War, the Second Boer War in Africa (1899-1902) had done much to undermine Britain’s confidence in its army’s ability to keep her colonies under control. A quick victory was expected, but a long, drawn out war had ensued, draining the numbers of British troops and causing doubt about the future potency of the Empire. Baden-Powell commanded the British in the Battle of Mafeking in the Boer War, where he became known for his determination to modernize British warfare, which had not advanced much since the conflict in the Crimean. The Second Boer War a jolt for Britain, demonstrating that its army was not invincible. The generals – Methuen, Baden-Powell, and Kichener – through the stern tactics they used with the Dutch farmers and indigenous people, turned world

---

124 Baden-Powell was born in mid-Victorian England in 1857, and died two months before Woolf in 1941.
sentiment against the British. Prison camps were set up, in which the treatment of the prisoners was so punitive many did not survive.

An important result of the war was Baden-Powell’s discovery that a goodly proportion of British soldiers were physically unfit for battle, which motivated his campaign to bring British youth up to a higher standard. This he intended to do through founding the organization that would train the young men of England: the Boy Scouts.

Scouting offers a paradigm for studying the effects of chivalry in the twentieth century. It helps to explain Woolf’s reaction to the problems incurred by embracing a knightly code as the foundation for social order. Based on Victorian concepts of chivalry as Baden-Powell understood them, Scouting was intended to boost the spirits and competence of the youth of the British Empire, reaching all classes of boys of all ages and abilities. Poorer boys were encouraged to be content and instructed not to cause disruption by envying their upper-class companions. Each boy had his own noble duties to attend to and was expected to know his place, exhibiting respect for himself and his fellow scouts by respecting order.

Like Arthurian chivalry, Scouting became associated with aspects of Christianity: young men were to be like knights in search of the Holy Grail. They were charged with giving good example and bearing the responsibility of representing and spreading British culture wherever they went. Baden-Powell assured them that the Grail was attainable by the Scout who followed the code, as “he will know what true happiness is, he will rise to great things, and he will get his reward in Heaven” (*Yarns for Boy Scouts* 144).125 By

---

becoming a Scout, a youth became a member of the ancient brotherhood that had made Britain great under Arthur’s rule in the sixth century.\footnote{My discussion of Robert Baden-Powell owes much to the keen insights into the history of scouting pointed out by Michael Rosenthal in his book, \textit{The Character Factory}.}

Lord Baden-Powell envisioned a militaristic model for the Scouts: they were never to take off their armor except to enable them to rest at night (Ibid. 121). For Baden-Powell, a Scout’s uniform was his armor:

\begin{quote}
A Knight must always be prepared, with his armour on to fight for the right – to defend the poor and helpless and his country. He must never break a promise. He must maintain the honour of his country, although it cost him his life. He must do his duty with cheerfulness and grace, his main duty being to do good to others. (Ibid. 119-120)
\end{quote}

Scouting was based on the specific ideals upon which Baden-Powell believed Britain was founded; his aim was to renew these ancient principles and make them flourish in the twentieth century. He designated King Arthur as “the founder of British Scouts, since he first started the Knights of England” (Ibid. 53).\footnote{Note how Baden-Powell uses “Britain” and “England.” The historical Arthur, originally from Wales, is often referred to as English, in spite of his British origins.} According to the first draft of what was to become the \textit{Boy Scout Handbook}, each Scout had knightly obligations

\begin{quote}
To reverence God.
To be loyal to the King.
To be kind and merciful to all.
To be always courteous and helpful to women.
To keep from fighting except in a high and just cause.
\end{quote}
To be always honourable and true.
To be always obedient in the laws of Knighthood.

If he failed to carry out these laws and broke his oath, “he was considered dishonourable and unfit to wear the badge of a Knight, and could be killed, or expelled from the association” (Yarns for Boy Scouts 119).

Baden-Powell’s list of obligations bears some similarity to the idealistic oath of loyalty that Arthur asks his knights to swear, though the Christian foundations of Scouting are not specifically mentioned, and a knight’s duty to cleave to one maiden is reduced to a Boy Scout’s showing respect to the weaker sex:

To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God’s,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her [... ] (Ricks III: 542, ll.464-474)

When Tennyson’s knights swear this oath to their king in the Idylls, a miraculous visual change occurs. To the onlooker at the scene, all the men temporarily appear to be mirror
images or duplicates of Arthur. Perhaps Baden-Powell, who like Arthur had no children, desired a similar cloning effect of reduplicating himself in the young men of Britain.

Although Cameron does not portray this scene of transcendence or male merging of oath-swearing in the *Illustrations*, she does stage the only other moment of visual transfiguration that occurs in the *Idylls* in a photographic illustration. It takes place when the Pale Nun wraps a ceinture of her plaited hair around the waist of Sir Galahad as he is about to leave in quest of the Holy Grail. The nun and the knight are transformed into the image of each other by their common purpose. Cameron found actors who look uncannily alike for the photo (fig. 20). Both moments of merging – the bonding of Arthur’s knights and the moment of union between Sir Galahad and the Pale Nun – contain an oblique reference to the *Imago Dei*, as both are presented by Tennyson as sacred unions. Though the other knights’ attempts issues in failure, Sir Galahad alone successfully achieves his quest. Galahad and the Pale Nun are the only characters in the legend granted a vision of the Grail. The knights are of course all men: Cameron chose to portray the singular episode of a woman’s apotheosis, raising her to the level of Arthur’s purest knight.

Baden-Powell did not restrict membership in Scouting to boys and young men. The *Girl Guides* were founded by the Baden-Powells and Julia Ward Howe as a counterpart movement to the Boy Scouts. Their purpose was to shape young women to be good wives and mothers, so in this way girls too could make a significant contribution to British society.

Woolf’s central argument in *Three Guineas* is the necessity for society to provide a wide range of opportunities for women. This was crucial, since she believed that war could be prevented by the empowerment of women through granting them equal education and income, and affording women the opportunity to acquire the voice, freedom, and courage to speak and write their honest opinions, and to disseminate them widely.
In the 1930’s, while Woolf was at work on her anti-war polemic, Baden Powell conceived a deep admiration for the Balilla, the fascist youth group run by Mussolini. The boys in this movement were disciplined to create a “new Italy” and were ready for war when it came (Rosenthal 274). Knowledge of his support for this fascist group would likely have added incentive Woolf’s inclusion of his image in her procession of the decorated men whom she held responsible for war.

Though *Between the Acts* demonstrates many of the principles of *Three Guineas*, showing how they inflected daily life, it does not argue for a political position. Woolf makes the distinction between art and propaganda very clear in *Three Guineas* (170), in which she likens the making of art for political purposes to the breeding of donkeys with horses: the result is the mule as a hybrid form, which is a sterile animal that cannot reproduce.

**Woolf’s**

*“Contra-dictionary of National Biography”*

At the age of five Woolf’s younger brother Thoby produced a box for his father filled with trash which he called his “contradictionary” (Gordon 1984, 25). Woolf’s writing could be regarded as a contradictionary to Leslie Stephen’s dictionary work – but instead of trash her counter-narrative is filled with treasures. She may have begun writing to protest societal oppression, but her writing was soon filled with intelligent insight and creative brilliance as well as righteous indignation against injustice. She struggled to free herself from the influence and constraints of hierarchical society and did so to a large extent by
conceptualizing a counter-culture to the one in which she had grown up, with its own counter-history and counter-traditions. Her ideas are spelled out in essay form in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, as well as her numerous essays and reviews, and expressed imaginatively through her fiction. At the end of her career, Woolf attempted to bring a new sensitivity and awareness to her readers through enlarging her creation of Anon, the anonymous persona she had first conceptualized in *A Room of One’s Own*, to be an aggregate, historical figure composed of all anonymous artists who had ever lived: a once and future unacknowledged legislator of humanity. Anon embodies the common voice and expresses “the deep sunk emotion” of the audience through theatrical performance. With the creation of Anon, Woolf attempted to speak for the silenced and forgotten.

**The Pageant in *Between the Acts***

After having lived through the loss of her nephew Julian Bell in the Spanish Civil War and experienced the devastation of the First World War, the war that was to end all wars, Woolf found herself along with other Britons a horrified and helpless spectator at the eruption of World War Two. Like many others, during these years she was vitally concerned with the causes and elimination of armed conflict. After she published *Three Guineas* advocating the education of women, which she believed would help women’s voices be heard and put an end to war, she started work on two ambitious books delineating a peaceful alternative social paradigm.128

Early in her career, Woolf found a model for social organization in the interactive and non-coercive gathering place of the community playhouse. She had long valued the Elizabethan theatre and sought to portray a local, small-scale, amateur version of it in her last novel, *Between the Acts* and fix the female playwright-troubadour Anon as the first author, still writing profusely today, in a survey of literature she would call *Reading at Random*. The manuscript speaks to the populist impulses Woolf felt, which were sometimes at odds with her more elitist beliefs. Not only did theatrical performance connect people, Woolf felt, it lifted them to a higher level than other forms of social-political interchange, for art reminds us of “the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity” (TG 218), at the same time inspiring the awareness that every individual person contains a multiplicity of selves. Feelings of transcendent unity would eliminate national boundaries; being able to imagine and inhabit new personae would enable creative solutions.  

Woolf chose literature as the subject for the pageant in *Between the Acts*, in an effort to preserve the nation’s cultural heritage and as an ideal subject during a time of war, since she believed that

> Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves. It is thus that literature will survive this war and cross the gulf [....] (CE 2: 181)

---

129 Several critics have noticed the importance of theatre in Woolf’s writing. Among these are Renee Watkins, “Survival in Discontinuity”; Brenda Silver, “Virginia Woolf and the Concept of Community”; Judy Little, “Festive Comedy in Between the Acts”; Andrea Adolph, “Virginia Woolf’s Revision of a Shavian Tradition”; Beth C. Schwartz, “Thinking Back Through our Mothers: Virginia Woolf Reads Shakespeare”; Elizabeth Wright, “Virginia Woolf and the Dramatic Imagination” and, most recently, Steven Putzel’s *Virginia Woolf and the Theater*. 
In writing her last book of fiction, Woolf experimented with the two-hundred-year old conventions of the novel. Dialogue is often presented in *Between the Acts* without authorial mediation, as if it were the script for a play. Through stream of consciousness the reader becomes privy to the characters’ thoughts as if they were spoken; occasionally two characters think in silent concert, a microdialogue that links them in awareness. The novel raises the reader’s expectations of a plot, but continually defeats them. It does not conform to the conventions for the genre established two centuries previously, but is arranged across pages in sections like a photo album. “Surely it was time someone invented a new plot” (215), a character muses in *Between the Acts*. Woolf aims at a new plotlessness in this novel. Though the classical unities of time, place, and action are respected, they are conceived in new experimental ways with elastic and permeable borders.

**The Structure of Between the Acts**

Like her earlier *Mrs. Dalloway* (or James Joyce’s *Ulysses*), Woolf’s *Between the Acts* is the record of a single day in the lives of a small group of people, the Oliver family and friends, but it differs from other modernist novels in that its centerpiece is the production of a play to which the reader is given the script in almost its entirety.

*Between the Acts* takes place in a rural village on the day of the annual pageant performed on the lawn of the Olivers’ country house, Pointz Hall. The particular play to be presented on this midsummer afternoon is a dramatization of the history of England told through scenes from its literary past. This pageant-play is written and directed by the mysterious Miss La Trobe; the audience is composed primarily of local villagers, people whose families have lived in the countryside for centuries.
Invoking literature of every period from medieval to modern, *Between the Acts* is considered the most allusive of Woolf's works, both in its frame tale and in the central pageant itself. Characters quote fragments of poetry in their thoughts and conversations. Peasants from the Middle Ages wind in and out of the trees chanting in the interstices of the play (BTA 139). The pageant’s six scenes are presented on the level grassy “stage” outside Pointz Hall. They are comprised of a prologue delivered by a little girl representing England, a tableau of Elizabeth I, and excerpts of romances from Renaissance, Restoration, and Victorian literature, each one a variation on romance involving the marriage plot. The pageant ends with a scene entitled “the Present Time: Ourselves,” into which the startled audience is drafted as players. Then, as a kind of epilogue, the local priest, Rev. Streatfield, sums up the pageant, held to raise funds for bringing electric lighting to his local church.

Three generations of the Oliver family form the main cast of characters in the novel: in the oldest members, representing the Victorians, are Lucy Swithin and her brother Bart Oliver. Bart’s son Giles and his wife Isa are in the middle generation; the youngest characters are their two small children George and Caro, who will grow up to be the future of England. A couple of unexpected guests show up – the vivacious “wild child of nature,” Mrs. Manresa, accompanied by the homosexual William Dodge. Tensions among various characters arise before, during, after, and between the acts of the pageant.

The particular day on which the pageant takes place is in June 1939, just prior to England’s entrance into the war on the first of September of that year. Woolf set the novel during the time of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, the time at which the earth tilts back on its axis and darkness begins to encroach – traditionally a time of celebration for ancient Britons. The earth's astronomical position is opposite to the one it occupies in Tennyson’s *Morte d’Arthur*, as the legends are narrated in the frame tale (“The Epic”) by the poet Everard Hall during the winter solstice. Hall’s narration ends with the
birth of the first light of Christmas morning and the beginning of the sun’s return to the earth.

The geography of domestic space is important in the novel: the working title Woolf gave to her first typescript draft was “Pointz Hall,” indicating the role she assigned to the house as a main character and unifying force. Intermission finds the audience gathering in Pointz Hall’s barn for tea, walking through the greenhouse, and touring the rooms of the main house. The novel marks a particular moment in history during which the English country house was at the end of its “Indian Summer” (Girouard 1978, 299-318). Shortly after the novel’s end, country houses began to be commandeered for military purposes or were sinking irretrievably into disrepair due to neglect from increasing economic pressures. The centuries-old history of the English country house had reached a watershed moment by 1939.

When the pageant is over and the audience has left, the Olivers are alone in the great room of Pointz Hall, its windows reflecting the fiery sunset, the play still hanging in “the sky of the mind – moving, diminishing, but still there” (BTA 212), as darkness falls. La Trobe, having packed up her director’s equipment and retreated to a pub, sits alone dreaming up the next summer’s pageant. On the last page the novel’s perspective is refocused and widened to include Isa and Giles Oliver acting out a scene in a “heart of darkness” (BTA 219), a primitive landscape, perhaps in La Trobe’s imagination -- as if they were actors in a universal drama, possibly the next summer’s pageant. The novel ends as a new play is about to begin: “Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (BTA 219).

In Woolf’s parodic pageant, which is the centerpiece of the novel, the literature of past centuries is rewritten in Woolf’s “literary” scenes to resemble relics from the canon, as

---

130 In her final typescript draft of the novel, in the Berg Collection of the NY Public Library (M10), Woolf separates sections of the frame tale into separate parts, naming the place in which the section occurs with underlined titles. Thus the novel consists of parts such as Barn, Dining Room, Greenhouse, Bedroom, Library etc. This indicates why the book was originally named after the Oliver’s house, Pointz Hall.
if to exorcise their power to dominate the imagination through having been satirized. Yet the canonical literature is preserved and performed as constitutive of the national cultural legacy and identity. As they appear under the direction of the playwright La Trobe, the major romantic love stories of British literature have become amusing episodes. Woolf pays homage to traditional literary periods and genres, each safely encapsulated in its own scene, each scene discrete and independent from the others, no longer able to encroach or dominate. Cameron presents the verse selections from Tennyson's famous poems in similarly discrete photographic episodes. In Pointz Hall, the canonical British poets whose volumes sit in the family bookcases are identified as the family's ancestors, "[...] poets from whom we descend by way of the mind" (BTA 68) according to Lucy Swithin. Like Tennyson, these poets have left their mark on the present day. Yet Woolf strives – not always successfully – to balance the sense of pride in Anglophone literature with the knowledge that it reflects membership in an imagined and repressive community; all sentient beings belonging to a broader, more inclusive group.

The important action of the performance happens between the acts and behind the scenes as well as on the stage in this production. The audience, cast, and director are all important components of the drama's power, as is the afternoon's natural environment, with its sky of illimitable blue, rain showers, cows lowing, and birds pelting the trees. Together these component parts make up an implied planetary organism. The play's "entr'actes" in the barn and greenhouse, combined with the ongoing inner commentary of the audience and the playwright-director La Trobe, elaborate the scenes and provide context for the pageant.

The extra material not included in the photographs of the Illustrations, aspects of the photographer we glean from Woolf's biographical essay about her and the drawing room comedy in which Cameron stars, provide background "entr’actes" that fill in the spaces
between the photos of the Illustrations. From these writings we gain knowledge of the flavor of Cameron's personality, life story, friendships, creative aspirations and methods, successes and failures, as well as the background story of each of the photographs. The images themselves are the central text, analogous to the scenes of the pageant; the extra material is a frame tale in which it is set.

The View vs. the Pageant

Throughout La Trobe's pageant the audience is in danger of being distracted by the British landscape, which continually calls to them as if it were the ancient voice of Arthur himself. As Patricia Ingham observes, the land is identified with the King's suffering body in Malory's Morte. As the quintessential British King, Arthur is identified with the land of Britain; the land itself is the king's body, part of the political-philosophical justification for the belief that the king can never die (Kantorowicz 273, 314, 318, Ingham 194-5). In Tennyson's notes, prose sketches, and poetry, Arthur's Camelot is a rural earthly paradise resembling the “island-valley of Avilion” (Bryden 142). The landscape around Pointz Hall is described as an edenic sanctuary, insulated for the moment from awareness of the “bristling of guns” (BTA 187) on the Continent – it represents the temporary preservation of an idyll in the face of an uncertain future. Arthur's voice, embedded in the land, is the voice of the past.

For much of Woolf's novel the Oliver family sits outside Pointz Hall on the lawn where the pageant takes place, admiring the landscape. Figgis, the local guidebook, points

---

131 Note especially the chapter “'Necessary' Losses: Royal Death and English Remembrance”(192-226) which discusses Malory's contribution to the story of British history.
out that Pointz Hall had been poorly situated in a hollow rather than on the rise of land next
to it which “commanded a fine view of the surrounding country” (BTA 52). The family refers
to the landscape as “the view”: it is an enduring presence which will be there – as Lucy
observes poignantly – “after they have all gone on” (BTA 53, 67). However, by the June day
of the novel, war had begun to endanger everything in British life, even the view itself.

Looking at the view is an Oliver family pastime; however, the landscape assumes
trans-familial importance, becoming a matter of national identity in the novel. Sonia
Rudikoff sees Between the Acts as “a meditation on the questions ‘What was England?’ and
‘Who should inherit it?’” (246). These questions have famously concerned the novel as a
genre from its inception in the seventeenth century.\footnote{For example, Austen’s chivalric modern knight Mr. Knightley questions Frank Churchill’s “Englishness” in
Emma, when he calls Frank “aimable,” but not “amiable” in the “true English sense of the word” because of his unruly vitality and high spirits. Englishness had come to be about propriety and property, about the view and
ownership of land.} Property ownership is of importance in Between the Acts; everyone in the village around Pointz Hall knows whose families are
listed in the Domesday Book (BTA 31). The older families in the area “had been there for
centuries, never selling an acre” (BTA 74). In the audience is a “great lady in the bath chair”
– a representative of the older families – who was “so indigenous […] that even her body,
now crippled by arthritis, resembled an uncouth, nocturnal animal now nearly extinct”
(BTA 93-4).

La Trobe can “feel [the audience] slipping through her fingers” at times, unable to
resist the view (BTA 152); even the actors lapse into mindless gazing at the view during the
pageant (BTA 165). The mysterious megaphonic voice of the pageant comments on the
importance of the English landscape, observing that “a view spoilt forever” is “murder”
(BTA 187). At the end of the novel, the view slowly begins to disappear in the dusk, not
destroyed by bombs as Giles had feared, but fading naturally, as the family’s imagination
ascends to the sky and fills in its loss with memories of the play: “[t]here was no longer a
view – no Folly, no spire of Bolney Minster. It was just land merely, no land in particular” (BTA 210). The creative art of La Trobe’s pageant is ultimately stronger than the view: the seductive voice of Arthur embedded in the paradisiacal landscape fades at dusk, if only temporarily.

Though the view cannot permanently compel the family's attention, neither can the photographs in the Illustrations or the scenes of the pageant consistently engross their audiences, in spite of Cameron and La Trobe's best attempts to present their work. The kitschy quality of the scenes keeps the audience and viewer continually aware of their artifice, preventing them from completely identifying with and getting lost inside the photographs and the literature’s sensuous appeal. Depictions of chivalry and misogyny from works like the Idylls, “The Beggar Maid,” “The May Queen,” and other of Tennyson’s poems lose some of their potential power as cultural icons when reduced photographically in the Illustrations to a series of awkwardly constructed, often sentimental, vignettes -- as do La Trobe’s earnestly presented literary scenes in the pageant which are experienced as humerous send-ups by the reader.

Complexities of Tone in the Illustrations and the Pageant

As mentioned earlier, Cameron chose “obscure” or unknown actors to play well-known poetic roles for a diverse audience of “common” readers of her acquaintance – and, since the Illustrations was issued in such a small edition, Cameron was personally familiar

133 In the last century, a play’s encouraging its audience’s aware of theatrical illusion was labeled by Brecht as the “alienation effect.” Today, Woolf’s emphasis on the medium might be categorized as a form of “hypermediacy” – a way of making the act of seeing hyper-conscious (Bolter and Grusin 272). Cameron tried to cultivate a Brechtian “culinary theatre” of belief in illusion in the Illustrations, fostering what today would be termed the sense of “immediacy” (Bolter and Grusin 272-3) in her photographs.
with most of its recipients. She thus had the opportunity to learn of her audience’s reactions to her work firsthand. As we read the pageant scenes in Woolf’s novel, we are placed in the position of an audience of “common readers” – as anonymous as Anon herself – enjoying a complex assortment of performances: we recognize and savor the old literary traditions, enjoy Woolf’s satire, while also serving as audience to the audience on the lawn at Pointz Hall, able to hear their thoughts and read their feelings as well as their words. The consciousness of the novel also slips into the mind of La Trobe, with her challenges, frustration, despair, and ultimate triumph.

However, Woolf’s attempt to maintain a balance between celebrating and satirizing the canonical literature through La Trobe’s pageant undermines a potentially powerful theatrical effect, making the apparently transcendent experience of the audience members at the play seem unconvincing. Though Woolf’s satire of English literature in the pageant is skillful, the distance it requires prevents the reader from entering into the dramatic illusion wholeheartedly, separating the audience’s response to the pageant from the reader’s. The novel has been received as a critical success, in greater measure than Cameron’s illustrative tableaux. For the reasons discussed in Chapter One, the Illustrations were not as popular as her earlier work. Inconsistent in quality and subject matter, they did not evoke the positive response from the public that her “big heads” of famous men had. Some of the tableaux, such as the death of Arthur (fig. 54), are so awkwardly posed as to have a humorous effect. Others, like the portraits of “The May Queen” (figs. 34 & 38), although aesthetically appealing, are intensely sentimental and out of step with most twenty-first century viewers’ sensibilities. Cameron’s efforts to achieve accuracy in portraying the details of Tennyson’s

---

134 Though Julian Cox estimates there are a dozen copies of the Illustrations in existence (2003 467), he does not designate specific place holdings, but suggests the provenance of single illustrations and outtakes in numerous institutions, including the Getty, Harry Ransom, the Metropolitan Museum, the Royal Photographic Society, George Eastman House, the Museum of Television, Photography, and Cornell University, etc., as well as in private holdings. I have studied the copies in Texas, Los Angeles, New York City, and Rochester. The librarians at Cornell were unable to locate the University’s copy.
poems occasionally cause her to sacrifice aesthetic effect for a technically correct realization. The botanically and temporally correct photograph of the May Queen and Robin, posed in an ungainly posture "leaning on the bridge beneath the hazel tree" as described in the poem, was taken on the first of May – a cold and barren day made even colder by Lionel Tennyson's morose look (fig. 36).

Though it is true that the dislocations of tone that occur within the pageant and the Illustrations confuse and undercut the overall effect of these works, thus compromising their power to produce a clear response from their audience or reader, if we define success in terms other than dramatic effect, they prevail as statements of authorial intent, critiquing the canon, and teaching the reader and viewer to think independently. Melba Cuddy-Keane argues that La Trobe is not a failed leader and her ‘failed’ play is not a defeat; she is dedicated to process, not to perfection of product. According to Cuddy-Keane, “her play can be judged a success if we think not of what she has taught the community, but of how she has stimulated them to think” (1990, 279). Judged in the same way, the Illustrations can be considered a successful photographic enterprise.

Anon:

Setting up Stakes Against Oblivion

While she was writing Between the Acts, a process she described as “threading a necklace through English life and literature”135 Woolf was also making notes for a nonfiction history of English literature. She was originally planning to call the volume a Common

135 From a diary holograph entry of Woolf’s, made on October 6, 1940, qtd. in Silver, 1979, 357.
History Book, but ultimately decided on Reading at Random as the better title. She finished the first chapter, Anon, and began plotting the second, The Reader, shortly before her death. Anon was to be a powerful figure, a leader whose influence could offset the domination of any single ideology and lead her audience to peace and democratic self-expression.

She formulated the concept of Anon early in her writing. In A Room of One’s Own she famously observes, “I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman” (AROO 49). But in Reading at Random, Anon is both man and woman, a balladeer or androgynous performance artist who explores the original “song” of the natural world, from which Woolf believed all of literature sprang. Nature’s first song was sung by birds and then adapted by Anon as poetry. She sang with the voice of the community, expressing the “world beneath our consciousness, the anonymous world to which we can still return” (Anon 385). Anon was to be an anonymous spokesperson intimately connected to the whole community, a balladeer who exemplified Woolf’s “philosophy of anonymity” (AWD 206) expressing the common voice and universal experience. Anon, as Woolf conceived her, was not dependent on an established order against which she rebelled. Unlike Robin Hood, Anon preceded social organization. By being prehistoric in origin, s/he became more durable than movements to critique existing order, including feminism, an artist who could flourish as long as human imagination and nature persisted on earth.

136 In some respects Anon is similar to another Modernist conception: the main character of James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake, Henry C. Earwicker, whose initials, H.C.E., signify “Here Comes Everybody” – though Woolf’s Anon also stands for a group of people, s/he is androgynous, feminist, and a poet-playwright.

137 Woolf’s idea of Anon’s ability to express the collective unconscious of the human race was influenced by her reading of Carl Jung – and also of Freud’s Future of an Illusion, in the Standard Edition which had recently been published by the Hogarth Press. Anon’s influence, as Woolf conceived it, was a romantic ideal equal to Arthur’s Camelot at its inception, as conceived by Tennyson. As states “to which we can still return” (Anon 385), both sustain hope for the future; Arthur as the once and future king and Anon will live on as long as there are anonymous artists representing and performing for the community.
Woolf had read her friend E.M. Forster’s essay “Anonymity: An Enquiry” — published by the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press in 1925 — in which Forster observed that “all literature tends toward a condition of anonymity and that, so far as words are creative, a signature merely distracts us from their true significance” — for creativity comes from common human depths. Anon’s words spring from those depths, Woolf suggests, and so she put her faith in literature’s ability to transcend the divisions and distinctions that separate people when the Continent became embroiled in another world war. She knew it to be one of the few ways in which human beings could step outside of themselves and learn what it would be like to live within someone else’s mind, a prerequisite for establishing peace among diverse peoples. Dramatic literature, a moment-by-moment high-wire act embracing each searing and unpredictable instant, can, in performance, reach its audience in a more intense and direct way than mere words on a page, Woolf came to believe.

Theatrical literature and performance preserves and cultivates civilized life in the Illustrations and Between the Acts. If Anon could give expression to the creative instinct of the community, buried in common human depths, Woolf believed, British civilization would gain the power to overcome the forces of darkness and disruption that surrounded it in 1941. In Between the Acts, Woolf demonstrates how La Trobe does this metaphorically, managing, “[w]ith the very limited means at her disposal […to] convey to the audience Civilization (the wall) in ruins; rebuilt (witness man with hod) by human effort; witness also woman handing bricks’” (BTA 181). This wall-building scene of reconstruction, though undercut by its being portrayed through words hastily jotted down by Mr. Page, a newspaper reporter, and further compromised by the often ironic tone of the novel’s narratorial voice, informs us that the audience interprets the pageant as a “flattering tribute to ourselves. Crude of course. But then she had to keep expenses down” (BTA 182). Woolf pays homage to La Trobe and Cameron’s relentless determination to (re)build the wall of
civilization through this compressed metaphor. This brief glimpse of reconstruction encapsulates Woolf’s faith in the theatre’s potential to create hope for the future. The world had become a frightening and desperate place by 1941; Woolf recognized the dire necessity of preserving and furthering civilization through the continuation of Anon’s art in order to hold the darkness back for all the inhabitants of the land – no matter how severe the limitations or crude the production. How to preserve a safe and fertile territory in which art could flourish and nourish civilized life was Woolf’s chief concern in her novel and Anon, just as preserving literature in action through photography was Cameron’s in the Illustrations.

Woolf observes in Anon that

To enjoy hearing the song must be the most deep rooted, the toughest of human instincts, comparable for persistency with the instinct of self preservation. It is indeed the instinct for self preservation. Only when we put two and two together, two pencil strokes, two written words, two bricks do we overcome dissolution and set up some stake against oblivion.

(Anon 403)

All of Woolf’s writing, but especially the work of her last years, was a way of setting up such stakes against oblivion, marking a boundary, claiming a space for civilization, which for her at that point signified the British culture that was under siege.

The “song making instinct” was reborn again in each generation. Woolf searched for a bridge between the past and the future, inaccessible save through the “twin searchlights” of memory or imagination, realizing that the present moment, the moment of the stage and the photograph, is all that humanity could ever inhabit. In her essay-sketch, “The Moment”
(CE 2: 293), Woolf describes the future lying on the present “like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver” and the past pressing up from below on the present moment, like “a thick glass, making it waver”—as if the time in which we live were a flat image compressed and caught on a glass plate negative – a photograph of the present moment preserved between two pieces of trembling, wavering glass, or a microscope slide.

Anon’s legacy continues to evolve through her descendants after her death, each person a potential heir “[d]rawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners” (Anon MH/B15, 1),\(^\text{138}\) because “[b]ehind the English lay ages of toil and love.” Eventually, Woolf tells us, Anon, the performer and playwright, became intimately connected with the theatre – where people gathered to see themselves on stage and where players acted out their emotions for them, expressing all their feelings, even the deepest and most intense, which might otherwise have lain buried and silent. Anon is connected to the players and audience as part of a community. She does not sit alone as does the solitary writer, an isolated individual struggling with silence and emptiness. Woolf has exchanged a room of her own for a stage in the midst of the community as the seat of creativity.

The theatre of Anon will go on, translated to our mind’s eye, forever. Like Cameron in the Illustrations, Anon tells the story “of Kings and Queens who are base and heroic; vile and gentle, like ourselves,” though her royal characters are cleanly “stripped of the encumbrances that time has wrapped around us” (Anon 385). She describes Arthur’s court and his knights as being “like ourselves.” When Anon’s play outgrows the “uncovered theatre” of the community, and is printed in a book, it must be “replaced by the theatre of the brain. Thus the playwright is replaced by the man who writes the book. The audience is replaced by the reader. Anon is dead” (Anon 398).

\(^{138}\) The quotation is from the typescript draft of A Room of One's Own, Monk's House Papers, U of Sussex.
There is some hope for Anon, however, for the reader can resuscitate her through his imagination by making his brain a theatre, a feat becoming increasingly more possible as “the cinema is now developing his eyes; the Broadcast is developing his ear” (*Anon* 428). We must take an active part, and as co-creators, make the performance whole through our imagination, stirred by new media. Even though “we miss a thousand suggestions that the dramatist conveyed” (*Ibid.* 429), we can, as readers using our imaginations, labor “to supply the sunk part of the play” (*Ibid.* 432) that has been lost by the sacrifice of Anon’s performance. We can take what is on the page and make it whole again.

La Trobe, as playwright-director of the pageant in *Between the Acts*, is commonly accepted as an incarnation of Anon, as she supervises performances of literature through the ages.\(^{139}\) Birdsong inspired Anon’s first poetry; birds fly throughout *Between the Acts*, as avian commentators on the pageant and the audience. The band of medieval peasants that wind in and out among the trees chanting during the pageant, their words blown out of the reader’s hearing by the wind, act as a Greek chorus and represent the earliest recorded literature (*BTA* 124). Cameron’s images of Tennyson’s poems also trace the history of literature: they are set in faraway places and long ago times, notably the *Idylls*, the ancient African chronicle of “The Beggar Maid,” and the story of the medieval Princess Ida. As avatar of Anon, La Trobe and her pageant of the history of English literature present "a matriarchal myth on a patriarchal stage" (Barrett 18), as do Cameron’s *Illustrations*.

---

\(^{139}\) Several critics are of this opinion, among them Nora Eisenberg (253) and Makiko Minow-Pinkney (195).
Cameron and La Trobe

The similarities between Woolf’s La Trobe and Julia Margaret Cameron are remarkable enough to suggest that Woolf had her great aunt in mind when she created the playwright-producer of *Between the Acts*. Like Cameron, who is thought to have had at least one Indian ancestor in her predominantly British lineage, La Trobe “wasn’t presumably pure English,” but was suspected to have some Russian blood” (BTA 57, 58). Both women were similar in appearance: Woolf describes La Trobe as “short, dark, stout” (BTA 203) and Cameron as “short and squat” (VP 14), “a brown-faced, gipsylike-looking old woman” (*Freshwater* 66). They both display an abundance of energetic self-assurance (BTA 58). Cameron is described by Woolf as having “passionate energy and willfulness” (VP 14). La Trobe “had the look of a commander pacing the deck” (BTA 62). “Her abrupt manner and stocky figure; her thick ankles and sturdy shoes; her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents” (BTA 63) cause La Trobe to be nicknamed “Old Bossy” (BTA 211) by the villagers. Woolf notes that Cameron was “an imperious woman” (VP 14) possessed of “indomitable vitality” (VP 13). Both Cameron and La Trobe address others “peremptorily” (BTA 122, VP 15).

Neither woman was a conformist or even particularly respectful of social norms, especially when those norms seemed like foolish or boring constraints: La Trobe “splashed into the fine mesh like a great stone into the lily pool” (BTA 64), a metaphor that echoes Cameron’s description of herself at “a dull dinner” as having “stirred the stagnant social pool by some eccentric remark”, causing her husband to observe, “I do not think it quite answers, Julia, to throw a bombshell into the lap of society as you are used to do” (Bodleian archives: fol. 82 d.13 MS Lett). Exotic outsiders they both were; neither was embraced unreservedly by British society. Cameron and her sisters were able to transcend social
conventions, having “forged their beauty, poise and social skill – virtues that were safely ‘womanly’ – into an iron rule allegedly forbidden to good women” (Auerbach 1997, 85). But they were not given universal approval. Lady Charlotte Guest, translator of the *Mabinogion* and friend of Tennyson’s, for example, would not attend nor allow anyone in her family to go to the Sunday afternoon salons at Little Holland House held by Cameron and her sister Sara Prinsep, desiring to “maintain the respectability of her unmarried daughters” (Guest 202).

Both the photographer and the playwright were intensely committed to their work. La Trobe felt it was “death” to lose her audience’s attention (BTA 140), and when her play threatened to fall apart in performance, and the audience seemed to be “slipping the noose” (BTA 122), she felt as if blood were pouring into her shoes (BTA 180). As Woolf describes them, both women’s labile emotions surge from joy to misery: La Trobe feels “‘triumph, humiliation, ecstasy, despair” (BTA 180) during the pageant’s performance; Cameron’s spirits alternated “between the seventh heaven and the bottomless pit” (VP 17). These two artists poured their massive creative energies into their work, the fruits of which they considered to be gifts they offered to the public. Yet both felt themselves to be of secondary importance to the others who participated as co-creators: “I am the slave of my audience” La Trobe scribbles in the margin of her script (BTA 211), and Cameron credits the excellence of her photographs to her subjects: “I felt as if she entirely had made the picture” she wrote regarding her “first success,” the portrait of Annie Philpot in the *Annals*.

Woolf likely had several people in mind besides Cameron when she created the character of La Trobe. Nina Auerbach suggests that Ellen Terry’s daughter Edith Craig, the theatre director and producer, inspired her; Jane Marcus hypothesizes that Cicely Hamilton

---

140 Lady Charlotte wrote, “I know there cannot be a worse place to go alone than Little Holland House, amidst artists and musicians – and all the flattery and nonsense which is rife in that (otherwise) most agreeable society” (qtd. in Guest 202).
playwright and author of *A Pageant of Great Women* – was Woolf’s model. Hermione Lee and Elicia Clements vote for Ethel Smyth. But La Trobe exhibits so many of Cameron’s unique qualities that it is difficult to believe that she was not at least a contributing influence and inspiration for Woolf in forming the character of La Trobe, if only as an unconscious force hidden inside Woolf’s creative imagination.

---

Woolf and the Optical Unconscious

The Interior Gaze

In discussing Cameron’s *Illustrations*, I have referred to the duality of vision operating in each photo as a feature that influenced Woolf in writing *Between the Acts*. Because the photographs present scenes from Tennyson’s poetry enacted by local Freshwater inhabitants, friends, or relatives of Cameron’s, the viewer of these photos simultaneously sees the literary characters and the local models. This double vision can be described as an “interior gaze,” according to Karen Jacobs (19).

In the case of Cameron’s work, the “interior gaze” challenges the simple trust in photography’s apparent inherent realism – its indexical, one-to-one correlation with actuality – that the nineteenth-century viewer would bring to the *Illustrations*. As the nineteenth century progressed into the twentieth, viewers of photography acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the experience of looking at photography, acknowledging that its documentary properties were always already blended with numerous other influences, including the creativity of the viewer.

The use of this new technology to illustrate scenes of the poet’s imagination expands the normative experience of looking to include more than a simple acceptance of what the eye sees – photography is commonly associated with the belief that “the camera never lies” – to the complications involved in the exercise of reading a photograph. Its awareness of the complexity of the image reinforced modernism’s doubt about the reliability of vision as a straightforward conveyor of knowledge, reminding the viewer continually of its
subjectivity. The concept of the interior gaze is useful in discussing Cameron’s photos from a twentieth-century perspective, enabling us to speculate how Woolf’s vision of Tennyson’s poems, as seen through her great aunt’s lens, likely influenced her work.

Repressed Optics

The theoretical concept that proves most useful in analyzing the relationship between Cameron’s *Illustrations* and Woolf’s late work is, I believe, the idea of the optical unconscious. The term was originally coined by Walter Benjamin (“A Short History of Photography” 203) to signify aspects of a Freudian unconscious he believed to be inherent in the photograph. Benjamin used the concept to refer to the extra, usually overlooked material in a photograph, such as the particular details that normally go unnoticed, e.g. the myriad adaptations of posture that constitute the act of walking, caught photographically by Edweard Muybridge and revealed in his famous serial-gait study photos.

“Isn’t it odd how much more one sees in a photograph than in real life?” Virginia wrote to Vita Sackville-West in 1935 (L 5: 455), as if referring to the Benjaminian optical unconscious. The ancient patriarchal social organization epitomized by Arthurian chivalry—which Cameron attempted to portray in the *Illustrations*—haunted Woolf through this property possessed by vision.

---

142 Recent research on vision and visual culture, led by Jonathan Crary, Kate Flint, Carol Christ, along with others discusses the evolving concept of vision through the long nineteenth century.


144 Available at: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muybridge_disk_step_walk.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muybridge_disk_step_walk.jpg)

Pierre Macherey has similarly identified the “splitting” point of a text, where its unconscious becomes available (85) to help us “trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it” (95). He does not however associate it with photography, as does Benjamin.
Though not addressed directly in her writing, she struggled with the diffuse ghost of Tennyson’s heroic king, haunted by him in the way she described being haunted by the ghosts of books that had been “shut up and put away,” but that are nevertheless “blown about the corridors of the brain” mingling and becoming after several years “scarcely recognizable” (MD/B10e). Arthur represented the powerful top rank of an ancient vertical hierarchy based on the ideals of chivalry that had become so assimilated as to seem normative. The problematic aspects of Arthur’s story, such as the unusual circumstances of his conception and fostering, are overlooked in order to foster the ideals he represented. With its code of valor and courtliness to women, chivalry reinforced the binary roles of the powerful, singular male hero and the angel in the house. Woolf preferred instead the lateral, inclusive organization of the community playhouse with its egalitarian capabilities.

An image’s optical unconscious contains its “repressed optics,” a force that exerts constant and relentless pressure on it. This is a slightly different form of the repressed optics that Rosalind Krauss famously discovered beneath modernist studio art, arguing that it exerts a disruptive energy that underlies the work of the modernist period.145 I have appropriated the term from Krauss’ redefinition of modernism to identify the ghostly influence of Tennyson’s verse on Woolf’s work as part of her familial inheritance. The Idylls, along with other poems, constitute a powerful repressed energy at work in Between the Acts.146 Chivalry was burned into Woolf’s unconscious; however I believe that her great aunt’s photographs provided an optical redemption.

---


146 There are many other, possibly related, literary influences on the text, such as its flirtation with romanticism, but the chief silent energy, most tightly repressed, is Tennyson’s Victorian poetry, which Woolf both savored and resisted.
Redemptive Optics

As well as acting as a disruptive energy, the optical unconscious is capable of possessing an optics of redemption, a neutralizing force that acts as antidote to manage the power of the repressed optics by providing a new vision with which to see it. I believe that Cameron’s Illustrations played the role of a “redemptive optics” (Jacobs 204, 209) for Woolf, allowing her to mediate the force of patriarchal chivalry and propose another, larger paradigm to encompass the old order. As a crystallization of a uniquely-conceived, independent view of Tennyson’s poems, Cameron’s photographs afforded a new vision of the forces of centuries’ worth of patriarchy, addressed as theatre. Woolf calls the extra visual and verbal remnants and morsels “scraps, orts, and fragments” (BTA 188), a phrase she borrows from Troilus and Cressida, where it is used to signify an illusion one wants to believe in but knows is false. These are the pieces appear in the photographs and verse, arranged randomly and in a seemingly haphazard way in the Illustrations that have come together recombined in a new, Benjaminian, “reconstellation” of ideas for Woolf, an arrangement of parts able to produce a new whole through an imagistic reconfiguration of pre-existing elements.147 Benjamin observed that history is capable of presenting a “constellation” or arrangement of parts from the past through the reorganization of which the present can find an image of itself in a flash or sudden awakening. Several critics have noted the relationship between La Trobe’s pageant and Benjamin’s conception of historical

147 From the Prologue to The Origin of German Tragic Drama, (46): “Truth is said to be ‘envisioned in the encircling dance of represented Ideas’” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/benjamin/

And from “Theses on the Philosophy of History”: “The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”
reconstellation, observing that the pageant re-presents the received linear narrative of history in new dimensions through the use of fragments.\textsuperscript{148}

By imaging Tennyson’s poems broken into parts, interrupted in their narrative, acted by unknown players, and reshuffled through the new medium of photography, the redemptive optics of Cameron’s \textit{Illustrations} “re-constellate” Tennyson’s work into an expanded theatrical vision, releasing the poems from their conventional context.\textsuperscript{149} In \textit{Between the Acts}, Woolf presents flawed literary scenes reminiscent of Cameron’s photographs, portrayed in words and acted out in the reader’s imagination. Cameron’s photographic intervention is capable of “redeeming” the oppressive aspects of literary history for Woolf, transforming it into a layered, non-linear, co-created conception of the past re-enacted in the present moment. Seen this way, it is easy to understand how the pageant of \textit{Illustrations} photographs could have acted as a visual residue or afterimage carried in Woolf’s mind, ultimately inspiring her to see the photos as community theatre, producing – through “scraps, orts, and fragments” (BTA 188) – a Benjaminian “flash” of historical insight for all involved, capable of leading to a new idea of social transformation (Jacobs 204).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Cameron was always already an essential part of Woolf’s identity, having been embedded in her memory through the presence of her photographs and the retelling of family stories. Though the compelling “aura” of her aunt’s photographs remained an influence throughout Woolf’s life, I argue that their power was

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[148]{Among the critics that have discussed the relationship between Walter Benjamin and Woolf’s writing in addition to Karen Jacobs are Jane Marcus, Patricia Joplin, Catherine Wiley, Michael Tratner, and, most recently, Angeliki Spiropoulous. Jacobs is the only one who elaborates the terms “optical unconscious” and relates it to the Benjaminian concept of “repressed” and “redemptive” optics – the latter of which Benjamin uses to describe the process of history and the reconstellation of parts into a new idea.}

\footnotetext[149]{The redemptive optics reveal the truth of the elements of the constellation, as described through Benjamin’s conception of the way the constellation privileges the part over the whole, destroying the old unity on the basis of a new idea (\textit{The Origin of German Tragic Drama}, Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso. 2009, \textit{Prologue} 27-56).}
\end{footnotes}
activated in a new way when the threat of annihilation arose at the start of the war during her last three years. Tennyson's poetry may have permeated deeply into Woolf's unconscious from childhood, but the *Illustrations* also became lodged there during those early years, capable of acting as a redemptive optics, forming a salvific subtext to *Between the Acts*.

Throughout her writing career, Woolf focused on the unremarked, quotidian aspects of life. She wrote about what she called “the lives of the obscure” for “the common reader,” terms applicable to both La Trobe’s pageant and the *Illustrations*. Using stream-of-consciousness narration, Woolf similarly conveys the complexities of human feeling and thought in ways that are today considered to be reflective of how the mind works in its conscious and unconscious processes. Just before writing her last novel, Woolf had read through the volumes of Freud’s essays that she and Leonard had recently published, undoubtedly becoming influenced by his powerful concept of the unconscious. The photographs in the *Illustrations*, flawed images presented in jumbled order, suggest the jumbled, psychologically complex experience of human life that Woolf portrays in *Between the Acts*. The reconstitution of the past issues from the collected fragments and irregular pieces of daily life as they were experienced by both Woolf and Cameron.

Related to the concept of redemptive optics is the idea of “remediation” or “media-morphosis,” a twenty-first century term used to describe a work’s migration from one medium to another, a transformation that allows each medium to reveal aspects of the work.

---

150 These phrases recur continually as themes in Woolf’s writing. They appear in her titles, essays, and diary. She suggests that history be re-written or a supplement added, to include the “lives of the obscure” (cf. ms. copy of *A Room of One’s Own*, 70).

151 Woolf was prescient in her grasp of human psychology. Much has been written on this subject by critics and cultural commentators. By conceptualizing the individual in terms of “scraps, orts, and fragments” she anticipated late 20th century psychological understanding of the self as a bundle of drives held together by a constructed narrative. Her description of the audience’s reaction to the pageant indicates the influence of Freud’s *Future of an Illusion*. 
that are concealed in others. As this project has suggested, the Arthurian legends have been “remediated” from oral to written media by Tennyson, transferred to the medium of photography by Cameron, in which they ultimately comprise a powerful set of images lying below the surface of the pageant in *Between the Acts*.

The concept of the optical unconscious offers a way of understanding how Cameron’s life and photographs helped create the figure of Anon, the social, artistic, and historical organizer – Woolf’s creative forebear capable of reconceptualizing history and challenging patriarchy. Cameron’s “redemptive optics” reconstellate history’s heroes into a new understanding of their roles: Anon, the powerful aggregate force of creativity through the ages, functions as counterpart and antidote to Arthur, embracing all the “scenes” that history can supply. Through La Trobe, Woolf demonstrates how theatre can curtail the dominating influence of any single hero, yet allow everyone, including the audience and players, a place, a role, and a voice in the people’s history, acted on Anon’s stage.

---

**Anon’s Community Theatre**

Tennyson’s poetry exerted a powerful cultural influence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Cameron’s photos expand its range visually and uniquely. Through her lens, the voice of a single poet becomes a series of polyphonic compositions acted by a cast of local villagers and family friends, each one a potential demonstration of cooperative history-writing. The two volumes are comprised of tableaux created by numerous players,

---

152 I use the term “remediation” here in the sense that it is used by Richard Bolter and Jay David Grusin in their book of the same title. “Media-morphosis” is a term employed by Mark Samuels Lasner (U Delaware) to describe a similar evolution in media through time.
each with his or her individual visual “voice.” Cameron’s intention in making the
Illustrations may have been to preserve – and even celebrate – the patriarchal cultural
legacy that Woolf found so problematic, by portraying representative pieces of literature in
the way she did, Cameron made photographs that alter that legacy, amending and
circumscribing its power. Arthur’s role is sharply restricted, encapsulated primarily into his
two close-up portraits in the Illustrations (figs. 24 & 28). He also shows up in two group
scenes (figs. 52 & 54), though in one he is part of the supporting cast, and in the other a
corpse. Female actors appear in all of the other twenty-four Illustrations images, in which
they play major roles. Elaine stars in each of her four photographs (figs. 16, 18, 50, & 52).
Through her casting choices, Cameron limited the bailiwick of the “real or fabulous king of
Britain” (DNB II: 598) to a small fraction of the total media space in the Illustrations.\textsuperscript{153}

Woolf, too, restricts Arthur: he has but one cameo appearance – casual and
ambiguous – in Between the Acts (BTA 154). La Trobe muses that a member of the acting
troupe – a villager named Hammond – could perhaps act the part of Arthur, and, after she
applies side whiskers to him – La Trobe thinks he looks “like King Arthur – noble, knightly,
thin” (BTA 154). Though knightly in appearance, Hammond is no fearless leader in
caracter; he “submits sheepishly” to her application of side whiskers (BTA 153). If he
should make it to the stage as Arthur, it is implied, his role will be limited, but it does not
seem to matter much to La Trobe whether or not Arthur even makes it to the stage as part
of the pageant of literary history.

\textsuperscript{153} Though Arthur is the titular figure of the Idyls, as he is in the Illustrations, his influence is much greater in
the former. The oath of loyalty he asks his knights to take express standards that underlie the entire epic. In the
first half of the Idyls Arthur barely appears, but the force of his presence permeates Camelot. This is not true of
Cameron’s two volumes.
Components of Theatrical Creativity

Conceptualizing the Illustrations as community theatre enables us to analyze the photographs’ effect as individual dramatic scenes. The pageant in Between the Acts contains similarly discrete performances which inspire the creativity of its audience and cast members: through the agency of a rural village community gathered for its annual midsummer pageant, Woolf offers a paradigm for an egalitarian, inspiring, and creative social organization made up of individuals possessing the freedom to unite or disperse, to succeed or fail, to reach higher levels of vision or sink down on their own. Woolf felt that the audience of a play did “half the work of the dramatist” (CR 1: 50).

The audience and players of the pageant are composed of all classes of society, a group diverse in point of view, capacity for understanding, attention span, taste, background, and age. They are collaborators in a communal experience to which each adds a unique element. The villagers play hallowed roles from the annals of English literature, altering both the conception of the roles and the audience and players’ knowledge of themselves. The audience connects with each other as a group, assuming its identity as an audience, and then comes apart, each invited to discover his or her own individual, distinctive buried “scripts” – new identities – in reaction to the play. Together they are part of a group that reconnects at uneven intervals interspersed throughout the afternoon’s performance. The performance evokes a democracy based on art, each component unique.

---

154 Critical response to the Illustrations and Between the Acts has similarly been remarkably diverse and creative, a meta-enactment of the part played by the audience to La Trobe’s pageant.
and yet dependent for its force upon the others. It survives as a whole, despite its continual discontinuity.

Like the actors onstage, the audience members are invited to assume new identities—through empathic connection with the roles they play, each scene placing the onlooker in a new position or “viewer slot.” expanding his or her capacity to experience and understand the dramatic transactions occurring on stage—this is part of the unspoken covenant that each member of the audience is offered, an invitation to complete the performance. Since each character’s expression of his or her individual point of view also increases the number and diversity of voices, the production is a demonstration of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, dialogism, and Bakhtin’s hypositized evolution of genre from Tennyson’s epic to Woolf’s novel—though the genre changes do not stop there.

There is a moment-by-moment adventurousness inherent in theatrical production. Anything can happen at any time in the performance of a play. “A fault in the scenery, a face in the audience, an irruption of the audience on to the stage, and all carefully planned gestures mean nothing, or mean too much,” as E.M. Forster has observed.156

In Woolf’s novel, the pageant is interrupted continually by all manner of things, almost as if interruption were an integral part of the performance. Many of the interruptions are not human: the rain exerts a salvific influence,157 the wind blows away the peasants’ words, the starlings pelt a tree, and the cows low at a strategic moment, rescuing the play for La Trobe. The audience interrupts the play with its intrusive thoughts and comments. They grumble, Lucy Swithin arrives late, they are distracted by the view, the

---

155 I borrow the term from Gayatri Spivak, who uses it to describe the transactions that occur between author and reader.

156 A Room With a View, (Norfolk, CT: New Directions 1922, 205).

157 The rain offers Isa an opportunity to quote lines of poetry, which indicates an evolution from Tennyson’s Victorian poetry to the more modern reinvented forms of Whitman’s “Tears, tears, tears.” But though “Tears, Idle Tears” is not evoked by the cloudburst, it is present in our negative imagination by association, paired with the lines from Whitman.
rain, the heat, thirst, and their unspoken thoughts and emotions. However the play ultimately moves them, hanging for hours afterward like a cloud in “the sky of the mind” (BTA 212). Cameron, too, faced a stream of obstacles and interruptions while staging her tableaux; La Trobe’s pageant and Cameron’s Illustrations demonstrate the strong perseverance of the director and the players to embrace whatever comes up and turn it into part of the artwork.

Unacted Parts and Transcendent Moments

In casting the actors for her tableaux, Cameron offered them new and challenging roles to play, as she does to her audience, the viewers of the Illustrations. Like La Trobe’s, her work could stir the recognition of “unacted parts” in its viewers, as well as in her actors (BTA 153, 195, 206). Lucy Swithin verbally acknowledges the pleasure of discovering dormant resources hidden within herself, inspired by the pageant. She confides in La Trobe after the play that its performance enabled her to recognize their existence; that, though she has played but “a small part” in life, she has all along contained within herself other, greater roles: in fact, she “could have played... Cleopatra” (BTA 153). Mitchell Leaska is struck by the power of Lucy’s realization, calling it “the boldest stroke in the entire novel” (PH 231). Lucy’s insight unites several threads of allusion that run through the novel, adding layers to the pageant’s literal, satirical performance, thus not allowing it to sink into simple parody. Participation in community theatre enables a shift in vision for the players and audience that continues after the performance is over, Woolf seems to say. Lucy Swithin’s visionary
Lucy's epiphany allows her a vision of the splendor inherent in the universe and the hidden connection among all living things. It reveals the great “power and glory” – words usually attributed to the deity – available in the natural world. Ironically, this transcendent revelation occurs at the side of the very pond in which the bones of the drowned Lady Ermyntrude were supposed to have been lodged, and which the Lady's ghost still haunts, according to a myth dispelled early in the novel as a silly superstition kept alive by the maids. The only bones found when the pond was dredged were those belonging to a sheep (BTA 45-46).

The realization of formerly unknown inner identities on the part of the audience and players suggested by Lucy's unacted part collapses history's received idea of a meticulous, fact-based timeline. It is part of the death blow Woolf gives to linear, monolithic versions of history or other narrative. Time is an illusion. It is stopped, compressed, extended, and dissolved in the novel. Later that day, after the penultimate scene of the pageant, Lucy's transcendent moment lingers, prompting her observation: "'The Victorians,' Mrs. Swithin
mused, ‘I don’t believe,’ she said with her odd little smile, ‘that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently’” (BTA 174). The old marks of identity and division no longer apply; moments of expanded consciousness inspired by the pageant bring Lucy to an awareness of an inner fluidity in herself and unity among all people.

Looking closely at the Victorians who act in Cameron’s tableaux vivants elicits a similar realization: they are versions of “ourselves,” the viewers, dressed differently. The expansion of identity combined with an awareness of unity among all sentient beings that Lucy achieves through La Trobe’s pageant help to enlarge the restrictive tribal “imagined community” that Arthur’s story imposed on Britain, an insight that extends also to the viewer of the photographs. In the novel Woolf extends her concept of community to include the whole planet, with its animal population and its weather – the wind and rain, as well as the sun, with its “illimitable rapture of joy” (BTA 23) and the vault of the heavens with a blue so deep that it “escaped registration” (BTA 23).

**Viewer Roles and the Theatrical Imagination**

Throughout the *Illustrations*, especially the second volume, we viewers are placed in the position of a particular onlooker in each dramatic scene. We see the scene while cast in the role of a specific character in Tennyson’s verse. Cameron runs her audience through twenty-four scenes from Tennyson’s poetry in a sort of self-paced programmed learning tutorial for us, her audience. We are invited to expand our personae and inhabit a range of characters. In Volume One we play four roles: Lancelot watching Lynette and Gareth (fig. 6), Geraint affected by Enid (figs. 8 & 10), Vivien spying on Lancelot and Guinevere together (fig. 22), and Guinevere bidding adieu to Arthur (fig. 24). The second volume, with its photographs taken from other poems beside the *Idylls*, demands more flexibility: the viewer
is cast in twice as many potential roles or slots. We are asked to adopt the perspective of Alice’s mother in *The May Queen* (figs. 34, 36, & 38) and experience the vision of the Prince standing before Ida (fig. 40). While regarding the two singers in *The Princess* illustrations in Volume Two, we are first the Victorian guests at Sir Walter Vivian’s estate (fig. 42), and Ida’s colleagues in their silken tent (fig. 44). The next three photos are viewed from positions occupied by multiple characters: we admire the Beggar Maid as lords of King Cophetua’s court (fig. 48), then become the family of Elaine mourning her fate as she departs on the barge (fig. 50) and members of the court at Camelot (fig. 52). Finally, we stand watching on the lakeshore in the persona of loyal Sir Bedivere bidding farewell to Arthur (fig. 4). In the last photograph we inhabit the persona of Maud’s fiancé in a close up (fig. 56), looking at the passionflower at the gate, embraced by vines, a splendid tear of farewell welling up in her eye. By the time we finish our sentimental education, our sympathies have been encouraged to dilate and our imaginations exercised.

Photography and drama are universal arts: both can be enjoyed without benefit of literacy. Though Cameron’s photographs and La Trobe’s pageant offer visual and aural pleasures accessible independent of their audience’s education or skill, they are both incorporated in books that require the ability to read and exclude the unlettered public from full participation. The reading of both *Between the Acts* and the *Illustrations* is enriched by an acquaintance with the canon, since both were created in response to dominant works of British literature. The pageant’s diverse audience includes members who do not understand or like the play, people like the retired civil servant Cobbett of Cobb’s Corner (BTA 98), as well as those who enjoy it thoroughly, such as the aristocratic “great lady in the bath chair” (BTA 93), who is apparently enraptured by it.

---

158 Matthew Brady, the renowned Civil War photographer, a contemporary of Cameron’s, was unable to read or write. His photographs were his “life-writing,” a record of his observations and experiences.
As a mixed-media project, *Illustrations* represent three stages in the evolution of human communication from oral performance through print culture, and points ultimately to the use of technology -- by blending theatrical performance, literature, and the new medium of the photograph. The ancient origins of the theatre in sacred ritual are an implied part of La Trobe's pageant, as it takes place in a part of the Pointz Hall lawn reminiscent of a prehistoric amphitheater bordered by huge pillar-like trees, near a barn that is compared to an ancient temple. Allusions to Isis appear throughout the novel. Cameron, who as noted in the first chapter, considered herself a priestess of light, like La Trobe, strove to capture the numinous in her photographs.\(^{159}\)

Our role as readers of *Between the Acts* is intricate and complex: we are asked to be audience to more than just the pageant. We are audience to the audience itself, to the family, the village, and the environment, but also to the past, both in the form of the ancient canonical works and scenes from prehistory -- Lucy's reading of her favorite book, the *Outline of History*, causes her to daydream about a time when the entire continent was populated by “elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters” (BTA 8). The pageant ends in “The Present Day: Ourselves.” Only the future is not imagined; it takes place at the apparent end of the world. The scenes are photographic: Woolf's "lens" in the novel zeroes in for close ups of small objects like the flower that entrances little George, into which he seems almost to climb (BTA 11); and retracts to encompass large distances, such as the illimitable “blazing blue sky” (BTA 84), the view across the village, the Continent, and the larger “sky of the mind” (BTA 212).

Everything is connected; everything separates. Though harmony in the novel and the

---

\(^{159}\) Woolf was mentored by classical scholar Jane Ellen Harrison, whose books expressed her belief in numinous, mystical experience which she felt could not be put into language without being falsified and misstated; she was convinced that they needed to be more “felt and lived than uttered and intellectually analyzed; yet they are somehow true and necessary to life.” (*Alpha and Omega*. AMS Press, NY 1973, p. 177). Patricia Maika has written on the connection between Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Harrison's work.
Illustrations does not last for long, we feel in these theatrical productions that even at the worst moments, “there is joy, sweet joy, in company” (BTA 196).

**History’s Dialogic “Eye”**

The pageant is collaborative in nature: the audience helps to create the meaning of the play through its expressed reactions as well as its silent thoughts and emotions. The play simultaneously preserves, critiques, and alters literary and historical tradition in its conversation with the past. Cultural forms, ritualistically repeated, eventually reify into legacy, but every time a play is produced it is a different thing, performed uniquely and eliciting a unique reaction from each specific audience – thus breaking open calcified forms inherited from the past. Woolf continually interrupts the performance of the pageant with a third voice that describes its flaws and makes observations about the intrusive comments, actions, and thoughts of the audience members and the producer hiding in the bushes. She undermines the dominance of the canon subtly through these techniques of interruption and fragmentation, and not so subtly through satire and burlesque.

In 1905, when twenty-three, Woolf declared, “I am going to write history one of these days” (L 1: 190). She committed herself to rewrite the old historical narratives so they would reflect all people who had lived, refusing to perpetuate the linear accumulation of facts about singular heroes that the writing of history had become. Setting out to remedy the ways in which she felt history had left out the subjective individual impressions of quotidian days and lives lived in undocumented ways, throughout the next four decades she continued to pursue this goal. “Historians work from the outer to the inner,” she observes in Anon, “from the house they infer the tenant of the house.” Her method was to work out
from the interior experience of life to its exterior manifestations. The missing bits of history, often subjective, intangible, fleeting, or personal, are recovered and given life in her novels.

“[H]istory, in our opinion, lacks an eye,” Woolf had written in 1904 (BP 23). By visualizing the scenes in literary history on the stage thirty-six years later, she gave history that “eye” – an eye similar to Cameron’s lens. Supplying a homonym for the “eye” of history, the audience at Pointz Hall, though a creation of her imagination, was a way for Woolf to acquire an audience for herself when the reading public had all but disappeared during the war. “It struck me that one curious feeling is, that the writing ‘I,’ has vanished. No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death” she wrote in her diary (D 5: 293, June 9, 1940). For Woolf, the community theatre was a gathering place where a bond was forged among all, their physical presence together constituting history’s eye.

La Trobe creates her version of English history on the lawn of Pointz Hall by drawing from what Geoffrey Hartmann calls history’s “reservoir of resonances” (1977, 109). She, like Cameron, makes her pageant an offering to the audience and feels validated by their acceptance of her gift. The pageant demonstrates Wai Chi Dimock’s belief that the strength of a text lies in its ability to possess a meaning that is vital and capacious enough to evolve for readers through the ages – each point reflecting the new contexts of their lives. The literature of centuries that La Trobe put on the stage had evolved into a new and different canon in many aspects no longer relevant, yet it remained the originary soil from which later writing grew. Arthurian legends survived through the ages into the present day, adapting to the times through which they evolved, both expressing and shaping British

---


161 Woolf describes Cameron as being “magnificently uncompromising about her art,” and “blaz[ing] up at length into satisfaction with her own creations,” knowing that her photography “[gave] pleasure to millions” (VP 18).
Writing, playing, and reading literary history turned individuals into collaborative builders of the wall of civilization.

The fluidity of a text’s impact on an audience constitutes its “democracy,” according to Dimock, as it is neither coercive nor restrictive in nature (1997, 1068). “I thought it brilliantly clever” (BTA 197), one audience member remarks after La Trobe’s pageant, to which another replies, “Oh my dear, I thought it utter bosh” (BTA 197). The impact and meaning of a text may be different over time for each audience, but unity, freedom, identity, and stimulation of the imagination and intellect are each text’s sustained and unchanging functions. In Between the Acts, Woolf offers theatrical performance as a hopeful democratic paradigm through which these ideals could be realized and on which the future could be built.

**Woolf and Community Theatre in Wartime:**

**Performance as Resistance**

"This little pitter patter of ideas is my whiff of shot in the cause of freedom"

*(Diary 5: 234)*

Theatrical performance can unintentionally end up being a political statement – an act of resistance, a coded text, or a demonstration that the show will go on in spite of any obstacle, even the devastation of war. La Trobe’s creative review of literary history, presented as a pageant, counteracts the jingoistic way the genre was being used in the 1930’s on the Continent to incite inflammatory fascist emotions.
Woolf's involvement with theatre was not limited to *Freshwater* and the pageant in her last novel, though these are the only dramas she wrote for which a script is extant. She continued the family legacy by producing amateur theatricals. In addition to putting on plays within her circle of family and friends, Woolf worked with the community theatre at Rodmell during the last year of her life. She wrote to Margaret Llewelyn Davies that she was becoming "an active member of the Womens Institute [sic], who've just asked me to write a play for the villagers to act. And to produce it myself. I should like to if I could" (L 6:392, April 6, 1940). She also reprised the theatrical *Dreadnought* Hoax that year – in which she had played a convincing role as a Abyssinian prince Mendax – in a lecture she gave at the Women’s Institute, acting out her part over again in the retelling. Later the same year she reported to her niece Judith Stephen that "[w]e’re acting village plays; written by the gardener’s wife, and the chauffeur's wife; and acted by other villagers,” (L 6:400, May 29, 1940). No record remains of these village plays having actually been performed on the Rodmell stage, though working on them may have inspired Woolf to write the pageant in *Between the Acts*.

According to Julia Briggs, it was common for small towns or villages to put a version of their past on stage in pageant form (219). In the novel, La Trobe and her little troupe of actors undertake a performance of the nation’s past, not the village’s. During Rev. Streatfield’s epilogue following the pageant, a squadron of planes flying in formation overhead reminds us and the audience on the lawn of Pointz Hall of the imminent possibility of another world war. Making the effort to produce a theatrical performance during this time constituted an important part of maintaining the villagers’ strength and courage. The community theatre served as a stable center of freedom and individuality in

---

162 Elizabeth Wright traces Woolf’s involvement with drama and “the dramatic imagination” more exhaustively than I can here, in her dissertation (http://hdl.handle.net/10023/510 accessed 7/10/12), as does Steven Putzel in his book, *Virginia Woolf and the Theatre*. 
which participation in a dramatic performance could register resistance to enemy intimidation.

In the summer of 1940 the Rodmell community acted out its resistance to the war in noteworthy fashion. A clipping from *The New Statesman* dated August 31, found tucked in a scrapbook at the Rodmell Women’s Institute, describes a scene which took place in the village at that time, which was at the height of the Blitzkrieg: a performance at which Woolf most likely was in attendance. Besides demonstrating how history and tradition permeate British landscape and literature through community theatre, it is evidence of the “show must go on” determination of the villagers.

When faced with an air raid, instead of letting it interrupt the performance of their play which was to benefit the Red Cross, the audience and cast refused to take any notice of the enemy planes’ presence:

“[W]e held our fete on Saturday with stalls, side-shows, dancing on the lawn, and the acting of scenes from Twelfth Night under the old mulberry tree, which is a stone’s-throw from the path still called Princess Gap because Princess Elizabeth used to walk there when she stayed in our village in the days before she became Shakespeare’s Queen Elizabeth. So it was all very much in English order, and we felt quite secure with one foot in the sixteenth and the other in the twentieth century as we listened to the Rector’s wife and Tom and Dick and Joyce and Annie transformed under the mulberry tree into Olivia, Malvolio, Sir Toby, Maria. The sun shone from a clear sky and there were 250 of us sitting on the lawn. There were mothers with babies and there were about 20 or 30 children playing about and sometimes getting mixed up with the actors. And then just when the Clown was singing ‘Come away, come away, death,’ the sirens began to wail. Not a soul moved; the play went on. I thought to myself that at least a mother or two would take her children off to shelter. But not a bit of it; they sat there and watched the children sprawling on the lawn as if Göring and his Luftwaffe were as unreal and innocuous as Malvolio.”

(qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 2008, xxxvi-xxxvii)

Woolf had observed that, “[e]very day they tell us that we are a free people, fighting to defend freedom,” but “[i]t is not true that we are free […]. If we were free we should be
out in the open, dancing, at the play, or sitting at the window talking together” (CE4: 174).\textsuperscript{163} The Rodmell performance witnessed the triumph of the villagers’ spirit over the threat of imminent attack, asserting their presence as free people.

Writing the pageant scenes in her last novel became a similar exercise in portraying resistance through the arts. The satirical scenes of La Trobe’s play are very different from her friend E.M. Forster’s outdoor pageant, \textit{England’s Pleasant Land}, a performance which the Woolfs had attended on a wet July Sunday in 1938 (D 5: 156).\textsuperscript{164} While registering resistance to enemy aggression from without, Woolf resisted the dangerous internal “occupation of the mind” by an oppressive ideology she felt England had outgrown.

Cameron, Woolf, and the Genre of Pageant

During the time Woolf was writing \textit{Between the Acts}, she was also reading books on theatre and planning her unfinished survey of English literature, \textit{Reading at Random} of which \textit{Anon} was to be the first chapter. Her reading notes from this time refer to books such as \textit{The Medieval Stage} by E.K. Chambers (1903) and Allardyce Nicoll’s \textit{A History of English Literature}.

\textsuperscript{163} The quotation is from Woolf’s essay “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid.”

\textsuperscript{164} She had also read E.M. Forster’s earlier (1934) \textit{Abinger Pageant} (aka \textit{Abinger Harvest}) and T.S. Eliot’s \textit{The Rock} – a pageant-play performed in 1934 to benefit the Forty-five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London.
Drama (1873), books that discuss the genre of the pageant, including the legends of King Arthur.165

Woolf specifically chose to call La Trobe’s dramatic performance a “pageant,” not a play, thus pointing out its similarity to the performance of history pageants, of which there was an extensive heritage, as the genre of the pageant had evolved over the centuries. The word originally referred to a platform on wheels built for the performance of Mystery Plays in the Middle Ages, but had come to mean a procession of tableaux in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.166 The pageant play performed in the summer of 1939 is defined in the novel as special, set apart from the plays La Trobe had directed in previous summers, two of which were Gammer Gurton’s Needle (written by an anonymous author) and a comedy made up by the local villagers, in which they caricatured themselves (BTA 59). In putting the history of English literature on the stage, La Trobe was participating in a larger, more comprehensive project.

The genre of the pageant had begun to be revived early in the twentieth century. In the volume that chronicles late theatre history, English Drama 1900-1930: The Beginnings of the Modern Period, Allardyce Nicoll ascribes the popularity of the modern “cult of the ‘pageant’” to the performances instituted by Louis Napoleon Parker, observing that “in spirit [...] the pageant was] closely akin to [...] ‘folk art’” (92-93). The movement was widespread across the English countryside. According to Christine Froula,

Parker’s first pageant, in Sherborne, Dorset, in 1905, drew nine hundred participants and fifty thousand spectators; over the next two decades seventy-three towns invited him to be their pageant master, and he

165 Cf. Woolf’s reading notebook (vol. 16, Berg/Reel 13/ RN 1.16). She was also thinking of Freshwater at that time, as indicated by her reading (in November of 1940) Ellen Terry’s Memoirs (1933), Edw. Gordon Craig’s Ellen Terry and her Secret Self (1931), and Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: a Correspondence (1931) in preparation for writing her sketch “Ellen Terry” (Feb. 1941). (VW Chronology 217).

166 “Platform” has come to have important meanings in the technology of the twenty-first century, indicating a change of medium – an important subject for this dissertation, indicating areas of possible future study.
undertook five more. His 1909 York pageant – in his words “all English History,” “Drama lifting our souls to God, and our hearts to the King – is that not National Drama?” – had thirteen thousand participants and half a million spectators over its twelve-week run […] Parker’s grandson carried on his “method of producing History without Tears” (404, n.8).

Having attended several pageants, Woolf would have been quite familiar with the growth in popularity of the modern version of the genre.

Pageantry was being put to ominous use on the Continent in the 1930’s. By the time Woolf began writing *Between the Acts*, the genre had been coopted into a propagandistic medium employed to support fascist movements abroad. Woolf made La Trobe’s pageant a decidedly British production, the performance of a new version of history that established a democratic covenant between players and audience. Pageantry was thus a way Woolf could provide a contrast to the jingoistic celebration of Germany’s pageants, staged to arouse nationalistic fervor. Woolf was acutely aware of the dangers inherent in feelings of nationalism: she had described the “unreal loyalty” (TG 78) of national pride evoked by tribal sentiments in *Three Guineas* (1938). In deliberately creating a celebration of Englishness at Pointz Hall she risked falling into a similar venture to the one that supported nationalism in Europe. The somewhat clunky way in which she satirizes the “literary pieces” in La Trobe’s pageant is the result: a way of commemorating the national past in a pageant without glorifying it.

The Woolfs travelled by car through the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and France in May of 1935. They were shocked at the widespread fascist mobilization they saw going on in the Continent. In Ulken, Germany they were blocked by a motorcade which turned out to be in Hitler’s honor (D4: 311). Woolf protectively insulates the village in *Between the Acts* from the activities on the Continent, immersing the rural summer day in an overarching illusion of quiet peacefulness and complacency. The pageant begins with Phyllis Jones making the proclamation, “England am I […] cut off from Germany and France” (BTA 76).
(my emphasis). That statement indicates wishful thinking for, by 1939, the year in which the pageant takes place, England’s island geography no longer guaranteed protection from what was going on across the Channel, as it had in the past. The invention of the airplane had effectively breached its moat.

In 1848, in *The Princess*, Tennyson had reassuringly pointed out England’s distance from France, the troubled neighbor that had recently suffered a bloody revolution – a violent occurrence which England hoped would not spread across the water. In the Conclusion of the poem, the narrator observes that the poem is securely set on the estate of "A great broad-shouldered genial Englishman" (Ricks 2: 295, l.85) – a man we can trust as the soul of Englishness. Glimpsing “the skirts of France” across the Channel, as if she were a threat of contagion, one of the young men cries out, “God bless the narrow sea which keeps her off/ And keeps our Britain, whole within herself, / A nation yet” (Ricks 2: 294, l. 48 & 295, ll.51-3). Thus Britain would be kept pure, safe from possible contamination from French skirts. In 1939 the threat from Germany was more dangerous and closer to hand.

**Characteristics of the Modern Pageant**

According to Marlowe Miller, a political pageant on the Continent in the 1930’s was usually comprised of several parts: the celebration of a national hero or symbol, accompanied by stirring music and triumphant display, the presence of a member of the royalty, homage to the national military might, and a demonstration of allegiance to the church.\(^{167}\) The genre of the pageant, which originated in the Middle Ages, when pageants

\(^{167}\) "Unveiling the dialectic of culture and barbarism" in British pageantry: Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts.* *Papers on Language & Literature* 34.n2 (Spring 1998): 134 -161. The shape of the section on genre and some of the discussion has been adapted from Miller’s essay.
were largely masques and mystery plays performed on a platform, had evolved to consist of “any sort of spectacular procession which presents tableaux and includes songs, dances and dramatic scenes.”

The *Illustrations* – a pageant of photographs – is a mixture of most of these elements, and, like *Between the Acts*, resists being a nationalist spectacle. Cameron’s project of illustrating the British national myth may have been undertaken as an expression of Arthurian hero-worship, possibly intended to reinforce received ideas of chivalry, but the execution of the photographs sheds a very different light on the material, as we will see in Chapter Four.

### Featuring Royalty and a National Hero

Each one of the photographs in the *Illustrations* is in its own way concerned with a kind of nobility or royalty, from King Cophetua and Princess Ida to the May Queen and the moral aristocracy of Maud. In the imagination of the country’s subjects, the British monarchy historically functioned as a powerful and enduring symbol; Arthur, as its first ruler, and Elizabeth I were both sacred symbols for the populace, as was Queen Victoria. The *Illustrations* celebrates Arthur, played by the porter of Yarmouth pier, and King Cophetua by an unknown actor. Royalty is also present in each of Woolf’s two plays: Queen Victoria arrives in a burlesque of the monarchy at the end of *Freshwater*. Queen Elizabeth

---

168 Cf. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 672. *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers a dozen definitions of the word “pageant,” most relevantly, “pictorial illustration,” “a platform on which scenes were acted or tableaux represented,” and “a show or play, usually wordless, exhibited as part of a festival or public celebration.” It does not suggest the kind of political agenda for the genre that became evident during World War II, demonstrating what Woolf calls a “subconscious Hitlerism” (“Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” 174, 175).
has an important speaking part in La Trobe’s pageant. Woolf tells us that the character of
Elizabeth I in *Between the Acts* is played by “Eliza Clark, licensed to sell tobacco” who can
“reach a flitch of bacon or haul a tub of oil with one sweep of her arm” – and that she is
dressed in “swabs used to scour saucepans” (BTA 83). This image deflates the expected
hagiographic, iconic view of the monarch. By presenting Elizabeth I as a strong-armed
tradeswoman attired in humble cleaning tools, Woolf breaks down the idealized barrier
between the commoner and royalty. Such personifications tarnish the glorification of
England’s divinized monarchical history, implying that England was built by ordinary
people the audience might know and feel kinship with. Cameron’s actors, monarchs, heroes,
and commoners, similarly wear costumes gotten up from the “scraps, orts, and fragments”
of her household.

**Celebrating Military Might**

In addition to promoting a symbolic royal or national hero, the modern pageant
celebrates its country’s military might. Chivalry required that a knight defend his country.
In the *Idylls*, the pageantry of the joust and the tournament represent military combat as a
form of entertainment. Tennyson portrays other scenes of struggle in the *Idylls* and
elsewhere; major war episodes open and close his epic, which begins: “All day long the
noise of battle roll’d” and ends with Arthur’s mortal combat with Modred. The tournament
is itself a kind of theatrical event staged for the amusement of the audience, featuring a
display of manly valor. Military strength was essential for the preservation of the Empire in
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, just as it was for Arthur in the fifth, enabling him to
unite tribes and defeat invaders, but scenes of combat are not displayed in any of the *Illustrations* photographs.

As previously noted, both Cameron and Woolf refused to portray scenes of military combat. The closest Cameron came to including ideas of struggle in the *Illustrations* are the verbal excerpts that accompany her two splendid portraits of Arthur. In one of them he is leaving Guinevere to fight Modred, moving "ghostlike to his doom" – though he appears sharply focused and not at all ghostlike (figs. 23 & 24). The second, which is accompanied by a verse excerpt that ends “[…] And uttering this the King/ Made at the man….“ (figs. 27 & 28), indicating that Arthur is in the process of launching a violent attack on his enemy, does not fit with Cameron’s photo, which reveals him standing alone, meditatively gazing upward into the dark corner of the frame, the reflection of an apparently spiritual light in his eyes. In a proto-modern filmic move, the camera cuts the *Idylls* scene at this point, leaving the next frame to the imagination, making the portrait a triumph of suggestive skill: the bloody battle is alluded to in Tennyson’s words and created in the reader’s imagination, but not in Cameron’s photo.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf points out the absence of military might by having an audience member, Colonel Mayhew, question its omission from the pageant: “‘Assuming that the theme or meaning of the pageant is ‘History,’ he asks, ‘Why leave out the British Army? What’s history without the Army, eh?’” (BTA 157). No one answers.

---

169 This is the order in which the photographs appear in the edition owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the copy of the *Illustrations* held in the archives of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center and the George Eastman House, the two photos of King Arthur appear one following the other, not flanking the photo of Guinevere and the Little Novice. Cameron apparently varied the order in which she sorted the photographs from volume to volume, further personalizing the books.
Stirring martial music is another earmark of the pageant as a propagandistic genre, for “[m]usic reinforces the theme of a pageant while it arouses and sustains the passions of the community” (Miller 138). However, that is not what happens in either Woolf or Cameron’s pageants, though each has its own “soundtrack.” The Illustrations is replete with Tennysonian melodies, making it a multimedia presentation for the delight of eye and inner ear, but none of the selections is either stirring or martial. In addition to the pictures showing women singing or those with song titles mentioned in the text -- Enid’s “Turn, Fortune,” Elaine’s “Call, I follow, I follow let me die,” the little novice’s “Late, late, so late,” the two songs from The Princess “Tears, Idle Tears” and “A Splendour Falls” – all the other photographs are accompanied by suggestively musical verse selections, from the balladic “May Queen” to the jingly sounds of “The Beggar Maid.” The music of the Illustrations is full of personal emotion, not national pride.

Though some of Tennyson’s official poetry was written to lend support to Britain’s military engagements, Cameron did not choose marches or anthems from the Laureate’s poetry for the Illustrations; its music, both visual and verbal, is chiefly lyrical. However, she does include a closing photo of Maud, a poem which seems at the outset to endorse altruistic sacrifice for one’s country in wartime, as the narrator of the poem begins to feel affection for Maud when he hears her sing a song about “men that in battle array/ Ready in heart and ready in hand, / March to the death, for their native land” (Ricks 2: 533, ll. 169-172). She sings “of Death, and of Honour that cannot die” (Ibid l. 177), a song which appeals to the poetic speaker, given his warrior mentality. The two young people in the poem are divided by class, a difference indicated by Maud’s allegiance to the venerable national ideal of chivalry. For Tennyson, these knightly ideals are never simple; in the poem they become...
increasingly more complex and nuanced. Having lost Maud, the narrator runs off to fight with zeal for his country in the Crimean War, ultimately feeling the “glory of manhood stand on his ancient height” (Ibid 582, l.21), and cleaving “to a cause that [he] felt to be pure and true” (583, l. 31), embracing “the purpose of God” (584, l. 59). The effort leads him to end a madman and an exile. Cameron’s beautiful photograph shows a weeping Maud in profile, but the accompanying verse does not reference war. A casual viewer would not make the association; only those who knew the poem would have connected Maud’s tear with the Crimean War.

Tennyson’s more martial verse is evoked by the sound track of La Trobe’s pageant, for which Woolf wrote lyrics for a pseudo-march that resembles his more military verse. The Laureate’s poem “Riflemen Form,” for example, contains an exhortatory refrain expressed in a march-like rhythm:

Form! form! Riflemen form!
Ready, be ready to meet the storm!
Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen form!

(Ricks II: 603)

Interspersed among the scenes of the pageant in Between the Acts we hear the sounds of what we are told is a “popular march” – its lyrics composed by Woolf as background music for the production. Though the subject matter, combined with the alliteration, assonance, and meter of the march, seem to be intended to stir patriotic fervor in the listener, fostering pride in the warrior, Woolf’s contextual deconstruction allows the audience to avoid being manipulated by the music: the strains of the march are overlaid by alternating scenes of the
audience’s unity and dispersal during the pageant. Starting off forcefully, the gramophone intones

   Armed against fate
   The valiant Rhoderick
   Armed and valiant
   Bold and blatant
   Firm and elatant

   See the warriors – here they come

   (BTA 79)

This absurd and bathetic military buildup is interrupted multiple times, giving the audience ample opportunity to react to it independently and individually.

First there is Lucy’s late arrival that distracts the players and the onlookers during the opening scene, then she causes another disruption of the temporal sequence upon which chivalric action is based, expressing her belief that the concept of time is nonexistent – at least for herself and her older brother Bart: “We’ve only the present” (BTA 82).

The next time the march sounds in our ears and on the page, its chivalric masculinity is undercut by the suggestion of Dodge’s masturbation, inspired by his seeing Giles – who is an apparent incarnation of the contemporary English knight – as he approaches: “William’s left hand closed firmly, surreptitiously, as the hero approached” (BTA 110). At that moment Isa also recognizes her husband’s adultery as she observes him with Mrs. Manresa, further distorting the intended meaning of the march of the honorable knight, pledged to love one woman till his death. She muses on the polarized gender roles by which they are defined, by virtue of the social code of the time, “It made no difference his infidelity – but hers did” (BTA 110).
Each time the song repeats throughout the pageant fewer of the words are heard, implying that the concept of the knightly warrior is shrinking and losing its power, as does the image of Arthur in the *Illustrations*, which begins with his idealized portrait and ends with a death scene portrayed in the most awkward and undignified photo (fig. 54, 81). Arthur appears comical in this final photograph, possibly because Cameron was attempting so earnestly to reproduce Daniel Maclise’s engraving of the death of Arthur (fig. 82) – including a scratched-in moon, complicated rigging, and fabric waves. The outlandishness of the scene is intensified by Arthur, here played by her gardener, who cranes his neck to look directly, almost pleadingly, as if trying to crawl out of the boat and escape the photographer’s studio.

When the gramophone plays the tune for the last time at the prologue to the Victorian age in the pageant, the warrior’s song is reduced to a measly “Firm, elatant, bold and blatant....etc.” (BTA 160), the “etc.” standing in for the rest of the march’s tedious and inflated rhetoric which the novel has become too tired or bored to repeat. The hero is not “firm” any longer; the audience not “elatant.” By the nineteenth century, this description of the pageant seems to imply, no one is paying attention to the words or music. The march, calculated to unite the audience through its “public music” strains, to stir patriotic sentiments and move listeners to action, has failed, undermined by a parallel and more compelling individual “soundtrack” than the one provided by the official words and music of the gramophone’s march.
Reinforcing Allegiance to Country and Church

After the pageant the audience talks casually among themselves about the war— their conversation pulls the novel’s narrative lens back from the stage and rural England, refocusing attention on the events occurring on the Continent. They express opinions in scraps of overheard conversation, commenting on Germany’s ambitions to power and the fate of Jewish refugees.

Woolf carefully identified the “unreal loyalties” embedded in patriarchal British culture in *Three Guineas*, recognizing that barbarism lay within civilized society as well as outside, in order to identify and defend against the fascism she abhorred. She was acutely aware that adopting an aggressive stance to fight patriarchal oppression as the crime of an absolute other would be to behave according to the logic of fascism, thus ultimately reduplicating the ill that was to be eradicated. The polarization of good and evil glorifies and demonizes opposing sides, setting the stage for a binary struggle that has little to do with the complex reality of the political situation. Woolf created La Trobe’s pageant to oppose and deflate the pageantry that was being used in Europe to foment bellicose nationalistic sentiments—without recreating an equal and opposite jingoistic effort, a mirror image of the movement she sought to defeat.

In addition to deflating fascism, the pageant offers an individualized invitation to all participants to come together in a shared experience of personal rhythm. There are no inflexible or monolithic oppositions crashing inexorably against each other in La Trobe’s pageant. As in the *Illustrations*, polarities in the pageant appear in a more domestic context, and, rather than being the random expression of extremes, appear as oscillating or pulsating

---

170 The argument that anti-fascism frequently falls into the temptation of replicating the behavior it rejects, through characterizing the other as absolute, is outlined elegantly by Russell Berman in “Foreword: The Wandering Z.” (*Reproductions of Banality*, Alice Yaeger Kaplan. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.)
movements embracing all points of the spectrum. The audience’s continual union and
dispersal, its focused attention alternating with diffuse distraction, function contrapuntally
to the background of the eviscerated martial music of the pageant. These tidal systolic and
diastolic motions in the novel, emulating the action of the breath and the heart,
cumulatively produce a stronger, more intimate rhythm than the military march music of
Hitler’s Europe. Such strategies were part of Woolf’s program to defeat “Hitlerism” in
England (CE 4: 174).

Pageantry had been created to serve religious and nationalist purposes in Britain
before it was used to support the modern fascist state (Miller 134). Allegiance to the Church
is an important part of the knightly code of chivalry as well as an aspect of the traditional
pageant, the earliest expressions of which were the staging of medieval mystery plays. The
Church is rendered as a female presence in the Illustrations, through its representatives in
the photos of the Pale Nun and the Little Novice, who demonstrate two very different
varieties and capacities for religious experience.

Though the story of the quest for the Holy Grail was added to Arthurian legend in
the twelfth century by Chretien de Troyes, and thus is not of British origin, it was included
by Tennyson in his epic and used in Victorian England as a rationalization for the extension
of Britain’s empire across the globe – though in the Idylls it is a disaster that leads to the fall
of Camelot. The quest for the Holy Grail diminishes the role of Arthur, drawing his knights
away on exploits far beyond the walls of Camelot, thus weakening what was left of Arthur's
kingdom. The Pale Nun, though severely restricted by the constraints of her religious role --
unable to travel or participate as knight – is singularly granted a vision of the Grail at the
outset of the quest. Arguably the purest and most virtuous female character of the Idylls, she
is equal in holiness to Sir Galahad, the most virtuous knight of the Round Table. Cameron
portrays their equation visually by using actors with duplicate profiles in her portrait of the
two (fig. 20). In contrast, the Little Novice, appearing shockingly young in Cameron’s photo of her, gossips away naively, tormenting Guinevere, unaware of the consequences of her limited understanding and childish chatter (fig. 26).

The modern equivalent of a Grail quest is no longer a possibility in *Between the Acts*: there is no equivalent to the Pale Nun or Galahad in Woolf’s novel, no one who would be pure enough to see it. Woolf draws her characters complexly: the religious and cultural icons of the Victorian age are lost or rewritten. Tennyson’s “crannied wall” holds a refrigerator, not a flower -- an appliance that is not able to tell us what God or man is (BTA 182-3). However, the show must go on, and when the local vicar steps up to do the best he can to summarize the pageant and tie it to his ministry, the gramophone creaks out "God Save the King" (*BTA* 195). As a flawed, very human representative who is the spokesperson for his congregation, Rev. Streatfield causes the audience discomfort:

The whole lot of them, gentles and simples, felt embarrassed, for him, for themselves. There he stood their representative; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by looking-glasses (BTA 190)

The vicar thus emerges as a gently parodied genial bumbler, a well-meaning appendage to the play. He redeems himself in his warm-hearted commentary on the pageant, but his words are interrupted by the flight of planes overhead, the most menacing moment of the novel, a grim reminder of the threat that hangs over the pastoral midsummer’s day. The planes’ arresting interruption signals the end of the pageant.

The final two chapters of this project will focus specifically on the photographs and text of the Illustrations, suggesting ways in which they relate to the writing of Woolf’s last years, especially *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*. Through a close reading of the images,
their significance to the theory presented in this chapter is elucidated and conclusions reached concerning the valedictory and elegiac nature of Cameron and Woolf’s later work.
Chapter Four

Reading the *Illustrations* with Woolf

Stealing the Spells

Woolf’s Scene-making

Cameron’s only published book, the capstone of her career, is not her most acclaimed artistic achievement. The two volumes of the *Illustrations* stand as an important part of her legacy – as does Woolf’s last published book, *Between the Acts* – but for many reasons neither work has made it to the front row of its author’s oeuvre, and therefore has not commanded the critical attention received by its creator’s earlier achievements. The photos of the *Illustrations* are not reproduced as often, nor do they bring as high a price as Cameron’s “big head” portraits – and therefore have not generally been as well recognized by the public.\(^{171}\) However, the *Illustrations* offer a good entry point for the study of the deeper, more complex concerns addressed by the photos, unrelated to the artistic and documentary qualities of Cameron’s more highly valued work. The two volumes open new possibilities of understanding Woolf’s valedictory work. Many resonances between the two women’s accomplishments have been discussed in the previous chapter; the business of the remainder of this dissertation – Chapters Four and Five – will be to focus on a selection of particular photographs from the *Illustrations*, analyzing them in terms of their relationship to Woolf’s late writing and their conceptualization of Tennyson’s poems. By doing this I

\(^{171}\) Recently they have achieved wider circulation. I have collected instances of at least twenty-five of Cameron’s photographs that have been used on book covers, Playbills, websites, or in advertisements in the past dozen years, but none of them is from the *Illustrations*. Her images have been used to illustrate everything from poetry and romance novels to texts on interpersonal psychology. More of her photographs seem to be appearing in publications daily: Cameron’s work has become iconic in the twenty-first century.
hope to show how the photographs may have mediated or re-mediated Woolf’s understanding of Tennyson’s *Idylls* and other poems. I believe Cameron ultimately became one of Woolf’s artistic foremothers, leading the way to some of the writer’s mature beliefs, including the value of community theatre and the empowerment of women through education, as exemplified in the *Illustrations*. Almost all of the photographs portray scenes in which women enact important roles, the most prominent example of which is her portrait of Tennyson’s *Princess Ida*. An Arthurian code of chivalry underlies Tennyson’s poetry, consonant with the patriarchal Victorian society in which he lived, and endorsed ambivalently by the poet. Cameron’s life and work, springing from the same milieu, must have helped ameliorate the most problematic aspects of that social organization for Woolf, while it inspired her ideas for its remedy.

It has become a critical commonplace to describe Tennyson’s poetry as visual, and to note how well it has lent itself to illustration. “Idylls,” after all, are by definition “little pictures.” Woolf, too, saw life in terms of visual images arranged as scenes. Her writing is thus an exercise in what she called her “scene-making” capability, as described in her memoir:

> Is this liability to scenes the origin of my writing impulse? […] Obviously I have developed the faculty, because, in all the writing I have done, I have almost always had to make a scene, either when I am writing about a person; I must find a representative scene in their lives, or when I am writing about a book, I must find their poem, novel... (MOB 122)

However visually-oriented they were, Cameron, Tennyson and Woolf worked in different genres, each from a unique point of view and toward a separate aesthetic goal.
Cameron’s “scenes” offer a variety of responses to Tennyson’s poetry, critiquing by their effect, if not intent, the fixed gender norms of patriarchal society. Her photographs show images of women cast in roles of artists, outsiders, and rebels, as well as domestic angels. The males, save Arthur, often occupy supporting roles in the Illustrations. Arranged in a seemingly random and haphazard order, the photographs present Tennyson’s work as a new narrative, changing the emphasis among and within the scenes, eliding some parts that were formerly important and underplaying others.

Both the Illustrations and the pageant in Between the Acts depend for their effect on selections from the literature of the canon portrayed through a makeshift assortment of costumes and properties. Sparkly gauze is turned into Sir Galahad’s armor in Cameron’s Illustrations (fig. 20). Similarly, the silver “swabs used to scour saucepans” (BTA 83) make up Queen Elizabeth’s cape in La Trobe’s pageant. Homely household objects assume new, magical importance in the photographs and pageant. Like Cameron, Woolf extrapolates the significance of the piecemeal collection of parts till it represents the patchwork quality of the whole of human experience, invoking its philosophical and psychological ramifications, and challenging the viewer to take an active part in filling in the ellipses, completing the gaps, and mending the interruptions in her writing.

Cameron and La Trobe’s Pageant

Having grown up amidst Cameron’s photographs, Woolf had them to hand for review while making her selection of the dozen images that ended up in Victorian Photographs, the book about Cameron she wrote with Roger Fry in 1926. Familiarity with the images apparently left a residue or afterimage in Woolf’s memory as she continued to
write about her great aunt and the Freshwater amateur theatricals throughout the last years of her own life. The amusing biographical essay about Cameron that Woolf wrote for *Victorian Photographs* required sifting through all the reminiscences, tales, and family writing she could gather about her great aunt, stirring up old memories. The character of Cameron, which began as two-dimensional, gained depth and complexity over the years that Woolf wrote about her, developing from the imperious persona caricatured in *Freshwater* and *Victorian Photographs* into its final evolution as the fully-developed portrait of a dramatic artist at work, suggestively epitomized in the playwright-director Miss La Trobe.

*Between the Acts* is the only of Woolf’s novels she set close to the time of its writing – between the “acts” of the two World Wars – indicating the pressure of current events on her work. The horrors of fascism and the threat of a German invasion had motivated her to theorize the cause of war and formulate strategies to prevent it; she published *Three Guineas*, her anti-war polemic, immediately before starting to write *Between the Acts*, and was reading reviews of it while working on the novel. As suggested in the preceding chapter, Woolf demonstrates the creative solution of using community theatre as a paradigm for a more democratic social organization in *Between the Acts*, where it functions as an act of resistance, a way of reconceptualizing history interactively, a demonstration of the imagination’s transformative power, and an entertainment offering relief from the anguish of everyday life. Woolf looked for an affirmation of humanity’s future through the strength of theatrical performance – it seemed to offer redemption. In 1940 Woolf published “Ellen Terry,” the essay in which she described the memory of dramatic
performances as “postcards from the stage” (CE 4: 67-72), indicating that she may have been thinking of the Illustrations in the same genre.\textsuperscript{172}

La Trobe, like Cameron, possesses the power to re-fashion the world. A sorcerer enthraling her audience, she is not merely a “twitcher of strings” (BTA 153) – a mere puppeteer – she exercises preternatural powers as a playwright-director. Evoking the witches in Macbeth, Woolf describes La Trobe as “one who seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (BTA 153).\textsuperscript{173} Cameron’s amateur photographic theatricals similarly possess magical effects.

Tennyson and Cameron as Merlin and Vivien

A close reading of the photographs of the Illustrations shows how Cameron’s illustrations take charge of Tennyson’s words in a way that reduplicates Vivien’s relationship to Merlin. The frontispieces of both Volume One and Two of the Illustrations portray Tennyson dressed mage-like, in a dark, flowing garment. These two opening photos suggest to the viewer that the book contains his “spells” in the form of poems. Tennyson is introduced to the reader through these portraits enrobed like Merlin, the wizard creator of Camelot, Arthur’s kingdom.

\textsuperscript{172} The essay “Ellen Terry” was published in the New Statesman and Nation in February of 1941, a month before Woolf’s death.

\textsuperscript{173} La Trobe in her work evokes other Shakespearean plays. She has been compared to Prospero by Julia Briggs (2005, 394). Her pageant, with all its magical transformations and role-playing is reminiscent of Peter Quince’s play in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The phrase “scraps, orts, and fragments” from Troilus and Cressida, as we have seen, is used multiple times to describe the patchwork, makeshift quality of her pageant.
Cameron positions her masterful “Dirty Monk” portrait as the frontispiece to Volume One. Focused sharply on his visage, the photograph reveals Tennyson’s tousled, fly-away hair, facial wrinkles, the bags under his eyes, and his unkempt, slightly graying beard: details that contribute to his appearance as a weathered sage. He looks off to the right, seeming to study a drip of photographic chemicals that resembles a spider descending the wall.\footnote{The visual reference to the medieval king, Robert the Bruce, and the legendary story of the spider is evoked in this image, though probably accidentally.} The book in his hands, enlarged by its closeness to the camera, could be an edition of his Poems – suggesting that he oversees the poetry that follows.

Cameron installed Tennyson at the front of each volume as an authorial, patriarchal presence, though his authority is progressively undermined in the course of the serial photographs. The frontispieces, figs. 4 and 32, in composition, size, and shape, are similar to the illustrations that follow each of them, and thus seem to be an integral part of the procession of literary scenes.

As the frontispiece to Volume Two, Tennyson again appears in a portrait clad in a cloak, this time studying his opened book it as if it were his own version of Merlin’s book of spells. The viewer imagines it could be a copy of the Illustrations, containing a smaller frontispiece image of Tennyson and his book, each copy of the image receding into an infinite \textit{mise en abime}. The book appears to be a source of important knowledge held so close to the camera that the book and the poet’s “master hand,” appear hugely out of proportion to the rest of the figure.\footnote{Cameron refers to her own “master hand” in the Annals as possessing transformative powers, By portraying his hand as enlarged, she emphasizes the competition between their artistic powers.} Cameron observed that the black-robed Tennyson of
the “Dirty Monk” evoked the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah in her imagination (*Annals* 14), though it is Merlin who is most strongly present in this photographic version of the *Idylls*.176

Sacerdotal power seems to emanate from the book and the robed figure. Through her skill as photographer of the *Illustrations*, of which the suggestive frontispieces are only a small fraction, Cameron presides over the transformational mystery of the “word made flesh” through the embodiment of Tennyson’s verse in her photographic tableaux. The use of photography to bring poetry to embodied life must have seemed an almost supernatural transformation in 1874, as it was such a new technology. Viewing Cameron’s role as high priest presiding over the village’s ritual pageant would have had its appeal for Woolf, who was deeply influenced by the work of Jane Ellen Harrison, classical scholar, ethnographer, and author of *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Harrison mentored Woolf; her work contributed to Woolf’s vision of a world made up of fragments, continually renewed by art under the leadership of a matriarchal figure.177 But it was Tennyson’s poetic spells, in the end, which Cameron stole to use as the raw material to create her magical images. His imagination enabled the *Illustrations* to come into being. She was well aware that her art was dependent on his.

**Cameron’s Black Art of Photography**

Carol Armstrong has observed that Cameron’s photographic work was a kind of “black art” (*Scenes* 392). Early photography was a hands-on dirty business: in a letter dated 176

---

176 Artistic representations of Merlin have often been conflated with Tennyson’s image. For example, Merlin appears sketched as a robed figure with Tennyson’s face in Dan Beard’s illustrations to *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1889.

177 Patricia Maika explores the Woolf-Harrison connection in her monograph, *Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts and Jane Harrison’s Con/spiracy*. 

March 1864, Cameron, having been warned by her mentor Sir John Herschel against "that dreadful poison, the cyanide of potassium" which she let run "over [her] hands so profusely." “Pray! Pray! Be more cautious!” he warned (June 1, 1867, qtd. in Gernsheim 1975, 69). She replied that she indeed feared she had absorbed "such a deadly poison" through a scratch on her hands while trying to clean them, using the chemical as solvent. She describes her hands as being "black as an Ethiopian Queen's[.]” Working with the complicated processes involved in taking a photograph in the 1860's was something like joining a secret society – a society of alchemists who could turn chemical powders, glass, albumen, and paper into images of actuality. It was hard physical work: in order to perform her art and create over three thousand images, Cameron had to handle thousands of cans of cold water and devote hundreds of hours to concentrated effort and hard labor.

From its inception, photography was considered by many to be a black art partaking of the occult. The photographic image was a substitute for, or even a part of, the person appearing in the image – a layer of the surface appearance, the “skin,” or, perhaps the spirit-stolen by the camera. Photography is so deeply imbricated in modern life in the twenty-first century that it is difficult to imagine the initial impact on Victorian culture of this new medium, which could cut an instant from the constant flow of time, preserve the image of a person, and freeze it forever. Photography seemed a way to transcend death. The portrait produced, though always already part of the past, was accepted as a trace of actual reality, proof that a scene had existed. Seeing an image gradually appear on a piece of white paper in the likeness of an observed scene, without the touch of a human hand or any other apparent authoring agency, convinced many people of photography’s supernatural power and magical origins.

178 Letter in the archive of the Gilman Paper Company qtd. in Lukitsh, dissertation (211). The chemicals she used might have hastened Cameron’s death, according to Amanda Hopkinson (personal communication 1999).
Cameron considered herself gifted with special powers as a photographer, claiming grandiosely that at Freshwater Tennyson was “the Sun of the Earth and I am the Priestess of the Sun of the Heavens so that my works must sometimes even surpass his.”179 She perceived a spiritual dimension to her art; photography was to her a sacred ritual, as suggested by the language she used to describe it. In 1863 she inscribed The Watts Album, which she made for her friend the artist G.F. Watts, as containing her “first successes in the mortal, but yet divine! Art of photography” (Lukitsh 2001, 12). In her autobiography, Cameron describes her photographs as “almost the embodiment of a prayer,” their spiritual elements most “devoutly present” to her when she had men such as her “Teacher and High Priest” Sir John Herschel before her camera (Annals 12). Regarding Cameron and her art as possessing extraordinary powers in relation to her frontispieces of Tennyson prepares us to read her photographs of Merlin and Vivien creatively.

Merlin and the Gleam

Though Tennyson designated it as the sixth, and thus central, idyll in the final version of his twelve Idylls of the King, “Merlin and Vivien” was the first one to be completed.180 The story of Vivien’s imprisonment of Merlin is pivotal to a reading of the Illustrations as a collection of Cameron’s “spells.” Merlin’s ultimate submission to Vivien’s power and her subsequent cooptation of his magic provides a template for understanding how Cameron may have inspired the persona of La Trobe concocting her pageant out of

179 Unpublished letter from Cameron to Sir William Gregory, October 3, 1872, Special Collections, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. Quoted in Olsen (227).

180 According to the poet, it was “all written down” by April 1856 (Ricks III: 260).
canonic literature written by men. The photographs illustrating Tennyson's "Merlin and Vivien" thus provide an entry point for a deeper investigation of the *Illustrations*.

Tennyson had had a special interest in the figure of Merlin long before he conceived his epic Arthuriad. "From his boyhood he had felt the magic of Merlin," his son Hallam observes (*Mem.* I: xii). By his early forties, the poet had identified himself in print with the sorcerer and creator of Camelot, taking "Merlin" as his pen name. His initial motivation for use of this pseudonym came from his desire for anonymity in publishing a controversial political poem, "The Third of February 1852." Once adopted, the figure of Merlin stuck as an alter ego throughout his life. 181

In 1889, three years before his death, at the request of his admirers, Tennyson published a poetic autobiography he called "Merlin and the Gleam." 182 It is his only autobiography, the metaphorical story of his career supposedly narrated to a young poet by a dying Merlin who describes how, while working magic under the direction of a poetic Master, he follows the melody of the Gleam of inspiration which led him along his poetic course. 183 In the long process of Gleam-following many events take place, most importantly the loss of Arthur, "[t]he King who loved me/ And cannot die" – a reference to his adored friend Arthur Henry Hallam, whose sudden death nearly extinguished Tennyson's poetic gleam-following. After a fallow period following Arthur's loss, "out of the darkness [...] the Gleam, that had waned [...] slowly brightening [...] Wed to the melody/ Sang through the

181 Ricks II: 473. The poem, urging a controversial outspokenness against the French, was published anonymously on February 7, 1852 to protect Tennyson's apparent neutrality in his official position as Poet Laureate and in support of the Queen.

182 "Merlin and the Gleam" is to be found as Part Two of Appendix A.

183 Cameron had originally chosen a poem of Tennyson's to accompany his photograph in the *Illustrations*, but the poet dissuaded her from including it because of its flattering nature. In a letter to Sir Edward Ryan, December 12, 1874 in the archives of the Gilman Paper Company, Cameron describes how Tennyson "implored [her] not to put that quotation from his own poetry underneath his photograph." Though the excerpt might not have been from "Merlin and the Gleam," the poem serves well as an ekphrastic substitute to accompany both frontispieces.
world” (Ricks 3: 209-10). The renascence of the poet’s lifelong inspiration ultimately allows him to “die rejoicing” (Ricks 3: 205-6), in his role as Merlin. The poem is written in short, dancing lines composed of trochees and dactyls, allowing the verse to move swiftly across the tongue of one reciting it, enacting and enhancing the effect of flying after the Gleam.

In his introduction to the Memoir he wrote for his father, Hallam Tennyson explicates the evolution of the poet’s verse through various stages in the course of the poem. Following the Gleam meant writing the “chief work of his manhood” both the Idylls of the King – which Tennyson wrote and revised throughout his life – and In Memoriam (Mem. I: xiii). The Gleam was a constant, reliable source of inspiration for Tennyson, always giving him matter and form for his poetic songs.

Though it waxed and waned, the Gleam always returned to Tennyson in full strength, a legacy passed down through generations of father poets, like Merlin’s spells. The Poet Laureate was part of a long tradition of bardic Gleam-followers. For Tennyson, the Gleam, or “higher poetic imagination,” was embodied in the figure of Nimuë, his female muse. Tennyson distinguished Nimuë from the spirited enchantress Vivien, who captivated and imprisoned Merlin in his Idylls (Mem II: 366), though Vivien and Nimue had traditionally been considered to be the same person.

Merlin in the Hollow Oak

Tennyson’s presence as Merlin in Cameron’s Illustrations initiates the conversation among the photographs in the two volumes. Tracing its arc through the images from the frontispiece, the trajectory of the Illustrations is marked by the double portraits of King Arthur at the midpoint (figs 24 & 28) and the photo of “Maud” at the ending (fig. 56).
Tennyson and Arthur each look to the right margin of the page -- to the East, from which new possibilities originate in the sunrise of each day. At the end of the second volume, Maud looks back at them across all the scenes of the two books, facing westward into the sunset and the past. The day is over; her eye brims with a “splendid tear.”

In Tennyson’s version of the idyll, Merlin ends up paralyzed by Vivien’s spell, imprisoned forever in a hollow oak. Analogously, in the Illustrations, Tennyson’s verse is captured by Cameron’s handwritten lithography and imprisoned in her photographic images. Taking Tennyson’s portrait was a struggle for Cameron, but she usually prevailed over his objections, as witnessed by her comment at the bottom of one of her prints of him which describes his portrait as “a column of immortal grandeur – done by my will against his will” (B. Hill 111). In the Idylls Vivien uses Merlin’s own words – his Spell of Making, inherited from generations of magicians – to render him powerless; Cameron similarly used Tennyson’s spell against him in the Illustrations, through her symbolic photographic imprisonment of the wizard in the trunk of his own huge hollow oak tree, which had been dragged over to her studio from Farringford at her command to authenticate the picture (fig. 14). In an analogous, but broader process, Woolf’s La Trobe re-envisions scraps and pieces of the male-authored canon for her pageant.

Woolf does not mention King Arthur in any of her published writing until the last year of her life, as if deliberately denying him space on the page, as she had done the photographs of the Spanish Civil War in Three Guineas. Arthur’s presence is suggested in Between the Acts – though he is excluded him from the pageant of English literature – and referred to as background to Anon and The Reader. 184 In the Freshwater drafts of “The

---

184 Woolf referred to Arthur’s court once before, and then only peripherally, in her unpublished story “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” written in 1906, at the age of twenty-four, Woolf was not to write about him again till thirty-five years had elapsed. The manuscript for the story was discovered and given this title by Louise de Salvo and Susan Squier. It was first published in 1979.
Searchlight,” as discussed in the preceding chapter, Woolf verbally captures and preserves Henry Taylor as Cameron’s King Arthur in an imaginary photograph that serves as her metonym for British civilization. Here Arthur stands for all of cultural value that might be lost in war.

**Tennyson’s Book: Text within Text**

**The Story of Arthur**

Tennyson’s version of the Arthurian legends is heir to an alchemical alloy of several sources from a dozen centuries, beginning with the eighth-century manuscripts of two monks, Glas and Nennius, through Geoffrey of Monmouth and the *Mabinogion*, to the manuscript of the fifteenth century knight, Thomas Malory, whose *Morte d’Arthur* brought the British versions together in one book for the first time. Tennyson did not make use of the French or German versions of the myths, even the popular ones by Chretien de Troyes, Marie de France, and Geoffrey de Strasbourg, ostensibly restricting his legends to the literary inheritance of the British Isles. The *Idylls* were to be an exclusively national literature, although the body of legends he inherited from the past and the Continent must have permeated his writing to a certain extent.

In the nineteenth century, Tennyson and Cameron’s friend and contemporary, Lady Charlotte Guest, translated the set of twelve Welsh tales into English. These constitute the most important work of ancient Welsh literature, for which she invented the name
“Mabinogion,” a reference to the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, a medieval Celtic text. Tennyson based two of his idylls, *The Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid*, on her translation – a fitting decision, for Arthur was Welsh in origin. Perhaps because of her friendship with the Guest family, Cameron chose to illustrate both of the Enid idylls although they are somewhat anomalous. A line of verse from Guest’s *Mabinogion* inspired Tennyson’s use of the hollow oak as a prison for Merlin, rather than the places more traditionally described for his interment: the crystal cave, fortress of air, castle in the clouds, hawthorn tree, or, as in Malory’s version, the space beneath a rock.

The whole of the *Idylls* having evolved from a dense multiplicity of texts, which in turn are themselves composed of tales passed on orally from other sources, makes Tennyson’s Arthuriad a creation of memory, hearsay, and imagination, a combination of many narrative threads performed over centuries by anonymous troubadours. Its meanings are plural, intertwined, complex, and indeterminate in their origins, like the sorcerer’s book of spells. Arthurian stories have strongly influenced the popular imagination, remaining a potent source of inspiration, proof that Merlin’s book of spells remains powerful.

**Merlin’s Spells**

With much effort and time, Tennyson shaped the large, layered, and nuanced collection of Arthurian stories into a twelve-part cycle. The ancient texts which contain the

---

185 It has recently been shown that *The Mabinogion* was written by a woman, another female who took control of an important text: Gwellian, the wife of Gruffydd ap Rhys, Prince of Dyfed. (cf. Andrew Breeze, *Medieval Welsh Literature*. NY: Four Courts Press.) If this is true, Vivien is the heir to a legacy of women writers and translators of the Welsh Arthuriad, an exclusively female enterprise for a millennium, until the twentieth-century translations made by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, now considered the authoritative text of *The Mabinogion*. The most recent edition of this translation (Modern Library, April 2001) is prefaced by an essay about the male superheroes of the legends, based on the mistaken assumption that the original author was also a man.
source material for Tennyson’s Arthuriad parallel the lineage of Merlin’s volume of spells, a book that was written and overwritten by succeeding generations of conjurors.\textsuperscript{186}

Tennyson’s book is thus an analogue for Merlin’s: both contain annotations by the “sorcerers” of preceding generations, from Merlin’s forewizards to Tennyson’s father poets.

Merlin eloquently invites Vivien, his eager apprentice, to share his power with an enticing description of the book that contains his secrets:

‘Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!
O ay, it is but twenty pages long,
But every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text that looks a little blot,
The text no larger than the limbs of fleas;
And every square of text an awful charm,
Writ in a language that has long gone by […]
And every margin scribbled, crost, and crammed
With comment, densest condensation, hard
To mind and eye […]’

(Ricks 3: 413-4, ll.665-677)

This “little blot” of text so richly described corresponds in size to the few existing facts of Arthur’s life, which have been overwritten and exfoliated into a literary-historical palimpsest. Cameron’s photographs may have begun as marginal notes to Tennyson’s

\textsuperscript{186} Numerous suggestions have been made as to the content of Merlin’s book. Some say it must be the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the locus classicus of creation and loss, or perhaps the earliest manuscript version of the Arthurian legends. Cecil Lang (in “Tennyson’s Arthurian Psycho-Drama”) suggests that it is the British Constitution.
poetry, “crammed / With comment, densest condensation” similar to the notations in Merlin’s book, but they ultimately appropriated his work, becoming an updated or revised text in themselves, suggesting a new way in which to see the story of Britain. Similar magic is at work in Woolf’s *Between the Acts*: La Trobe thinks about how she has ensorcelled her audience with her “awful charm,” her own Spell of Making. Then, at the moment when it seems to be broken, “[t]his is death, death, death, she note[s] in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails” (BTA 180). Like Tennyson’s, her magic returns in force to complete the magic of the play.

Though later removed, in its 1842 version, Tennyson’s story of Arthur was embedded within a frame tale. By placing it there, the poet added another layer to his Merlin-spell, topping off its endlessly receding series of writings within writings, stories within stories, legends based on myth, memory, rumor, or invention. There is with Merlin’s text, as there is with the whole of Arthurian legend, a sense of a *mise en abîme*, of its being embedded within a system of concatenated mirrored texts and images, whose origin goes back to an inaccessible, imagined, past.

**The Story of Cameron’s “Vivien and Merlin”**

In the layout for the *Illustrations*, by situating the selections of Tennyson’s poetry on the verso, less significant side of the pages, and her own photographic versions of the poems on the recto, Cameron steals the reader’s attention away from his work to hers; we view her photographs first when turning the pages, as the eye naturally falls on the right side of the book. Cameron, we see, plays Vivien to his Merlin spatially by co-opting Tennyson’s book of
magical incantations with her images and thus upstaging his verse. Rather than a collaborative effort, the two volumes of the Illustrations thus trace Cameron’s appropriation of Tennyson’s words and end up as an expression of her vision, not his.

Cameron’s husband plays the part of Merlin in her photographs of the “Merlin and Vivien” idyll. In the first of the two photographs (fig. 12), Charles Cameron holds his own tall walking staff as his scepter as he sits in a chair borrowed from the Camerons’ home— the same chair that we see again in “Elaine” (fig. 18), “Guinevere” (fig. 26), and “Mariana” (fig. 46) -- while Vivien draws close to him in order to persuade him to give her his magic, looking up at him beseechingly and combing his beard with her fingers. Charles Cameron’s long white beard has been extended with cotton wool for dramatic effect in this picture. Several stray hairs have come loose, likely from Vivien’s combing his beard with her fingers; they lie tangled on his left thigh.

The part of Vivien is played in the Illustrations by twenty-four year old Agnes Mangles, daughter of Captain Mangles of Poyle Park, whom Cameron conscripted into sitting during the Mangles family’s summer vacations at Freshwater. Agnes Mangles later married Sir Arthur Wakefield Chapman and wrote an unflattering but humorous essay about the trials of sitting for Cameron, including the giggles shared by Merlin and Vivien to the photographer’s irritation.

---

187 Cameron kept complete control of the book by writing the poems out in her own hand on a stone and having them lithographed, rather than printed out. The only printed portion of the two volumes is the title page and dedicatory sonnet of each. All the rest is literally the product of Cameron's handiwork.

188 According to John Pfordresher in the introduction to the variorum edition of the Idylls, Cameron also appropriated one of the few copies of “Merlin and Vivien” in the 1850’s when “Tennyson gave this manuscript to Mrs. Julia Cameron, the pioneer photographer and his neighbor on the Isle of Wight. She sent to him asking for the manuscript of “Guinevere,” the Victorian favorite from the first volume of the Idylls. Evidently Emily Tennyson was slightly piqued at this, and Alfred sent Mrs. Cameron’ the draft for “Merlin and Vivien.” It, like the Huntington [ms], is complete, and it is evidently one of the last copies made before the first printed proof” (Pfordresher 25). Emily Tennyson records in her journal that on July 1, 1859 Cameron’s servant Ellen appeared at their door to their “astonishment” to ask for the manuscript of Guinevere, which they would not give her, even though “One does not like to refuse kind & energetic Mrs. Cameron anything” (Journal 137).

There are discrepancies between the scene the photograph portrays and the scene described in the verse it illustrates. The caption Cameron chose, “So dark a forethought roll’d around his brain,” indicates that in the theatre of his mind Merlin foresaw his oncoming doom, though he could or would do nothing to forestall it. Just so did Cameron see her oncoming departure for Ceylon and feel helpless to avert it. Brian Hill explains the immediacy of the move to Ceylon thusly: “four out of the Camerons’ five sons were already in Ceylon; it would be less expensive to live there than in England. Charles loved Ceylon and wanted to live there. At the thought of returning to Ceylon, Charles rose from his bed and for the first time in twelve years, walked down to the seashore” (146). The photograph conveys a softer, friendlier atmosphere: no dark forethought permeates the appearance of this gentle pair. Cameron had expressed doubt that Mangles was strong enough in appearance for the role, in a letter to Sir Edward Ryan she described her model as, “[...] not wicked eno' for she is a sweet girl, but she is lissome and graceful and piquante I think” (Gernsheim, 1975, 47). The loose, flowing back hair in the photographs may have been the result of Tennyson’s expressed preference, in the style of the Empress Eugenie (Mem. I: 85). In her choice to use Mangles as Vivien anyway, Cameron revised the character visually.

Cameron also revised the seduction of Merlin in her second photograph (fig. 14). The actors in the first scene, “Merlin and Vivien,” are positioned in a version of the classic pose Cameron had used many times previously: a younger woman kneeling in front of, and reaching upward toward, an older man while studying his countenance in admiration or supplication. Her illustrations of “Prospero & Miranda” and “Friar Lawrence & Juliet” (figs. 84 & 85) exemplify this configuration. Amanda Hopkinson reads this postural arrangement visually.

190 Using the brain in a similarly spatial metaphor, Woolf was, almost a century later, to refer cinematically to thoughts that “shoulder each other out across the screen of my brain” (D3: 114).
as paradigmatic of Cameron’s own relationship with her “fatherly” husband, twenty years her senior. However paternalistic Charles Cameron was in his wife’s images and in the ideology he apparently subscribed to, his behavior with her was indulgent: he allowed his wife to have her way in most instances. Nor does Vivien appear voluptuously enticing in the seductive first Illustrations photo of the couple (fig. 12) – the young woman’s hand rests reverently on Charles Cameron’s beard, and Merlin looks passively down at a Vivien whose erect posture does not seem at all snakelike. Tennyson’s suggestive verbs, “writhed,” “twined,” “slided,” “clung,” “droop,” are not borne out by the photograph of the young woman clad in white half kneeling close to the elderly man. In comparison, Gustave Doré’s etching, “Merlin and Vivien in Repose,” which may have been the original model for Cameron’s photograph, shows a more snakelike Vivien, whose sinuous body is twisted onto Merlin’s lap. Unlike Charles Cameron, the wizard in the etching seems to struggle not to touch her, his hands lying in close proximity to her body.

In the second photograph of Merlin and Vivien, Cameron renders her husband powerless, perhaps enacting her wish to maintain the status quo of their lives, to stay in

---

191 In Freshwater, Woolf has Cameron describe her husband’s beard in the opening lines of the play as she washes his head in preparation for their departure for Ceylon, mocking Tennyson’s description of the beard: “Remember what Alfred Tennyson said of you --
A philosopher with his beard dipped in moonlight.
A chimney sweep with his beard dipped in soot.”


193 Edwin Burne-Jones’ painting “The Beguiling of Merlin,” completed in 1874, the same year as Cameron’s photo, shows Vivien/Nimuë as a Medusa-like creature with a head full of snakey hair, revealing her kinship with Holman Hunt’s version of “The Lady of Shalott” in the 1857 Moxon Tennyson. Cameron was well aware that, though Tennyson generally liked loose, flowing back hair that covered a woman’s ears (Mem. II: 85), he disapproved of the way in which the Lady of Shalott’s hair was “streaming out in all directions” in Hunt’s illustration (Weaver 68), as if it were part of her magic at the loom. Seeing the evidentiary proof, even as a trace, of Vivien and Merlin’s embodied existence evokes a more immediate response in the viewer.
England, and continue photographing. Though she was the first to agree that the move was necessary, its urgency was a reminder of her failure to earn enough through the sale of her photographs to keep the family afloat financially. The move put an end to her career: the climate in Ceylon was not conducive to photography, nor was Cameron surrounded by the supportive group of family and friends in her new island that she had enjoyed on her British isle.

The Spell of Making

Tennyson tells us that the “Spell of Making” Vivien uses to imprison Merlin is written in an ancient untranslatable language - a charm first used by an Eastern king to control the “magnet-like” effects of his wife’s beauty (Ricks 3: 411, l.571). To appease the jealousy and chaos his wife caused in the king’s country, he cast the charm so that “no man could see her more, / Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm, / Coming and going, and she lay as dead, / And lost all use of life [...]” (Ricks 3: 413, ll. 640-643).

Entrapment for the purpose of securing the complete ownership and adoration of an attractive woman would seem a narcissistic, misogynist endeavor. But when Vivien turns the spell around and traps Merlin it is to gain freedom and power. In Cameron’s version of the ancient legacy, the photograph offers the viewer possession and enjoyment of the sight of a sitter.

In order to fulfill his initial Idylls schema of four poems based on women, two “true” (Elaine and Enid) and two “false” (Vivien, and Guinevere), Tennyson decided to separate the

---

194 In Volume Two Charles Cameron plays the part of the “dumb old servitor” who steers Elaine’s bark down to Camelot after her death. He is silenced and obedient, a supporting actor in Elaine’s posthumous performance art. Cameron used Tennyson’s words to immobilize him as Merlin, and take away his voice, making him submissive as the loyal servitor.
persona of Vivien into two women, endowing the figure he named “Vivien” with evil
attributes, and making her a treacherous harlot. He split off the original Vivien’s good
characteristics; giving them to a character who became “the Lady of the Lake” in the Idylls. It
is she who forges Excalibur for Arthur and receives it again in “The Passing of Arthur,” when
it is hurled out over the water by Sir Bedivere. She watches over Arthur throughout his life,
protecting and nurturing him. Cameron suggests her Vivien is identified with Arthur’s
guardian by dressing her in white, enacting the line that describes the Lady of the Lake in
the Idylls, who appears “clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful” – a phrase repeated
four times in Tennyson’s epic. It is the Lady of the Lake in the Idylls who gives Arthur his
power, not Merlin. Cameron’s Vivien combines both good and insubordinate qualities.

In contrast, Tennyson’s Vivien is “a viper” and a “loathsome sight” in the Idylls,
referred to by other characters variously as belonging to a family of “snakes within the
grass” that will sting (Ricks 3: 396, l.33), and a “little rat that bores in the dyke” (Ricks 3:
399, l.110). She sings ominously of the “rift within the lute, / That by and by will make the
music mute” (Ricks 3: 406, ll.388-9). It is her rumors about the Queen’s adultery that cause
the rift. She, like Guinevere, bears the burden of guilt for the fall of Camelot and Britain’s
consequent loss of its garden paradise. Yet neither Vivien nor Guinevere appears blame-
worthy in Cameron’s Illustrations.

Though Tennyson makes his Vivien irrevocably evil, she was not historically
portrayed so in ancient legend. The older French vulgate version of the tales casts her as
Merlin’s student and the woman he loves. Merlin himself in this iteration appears as the son
of the devil. In order to preserve their romantic happiness in this version, Vivien traps
Merlin in a tower, where he is a kept man.195 In Malory’s Morte d’Arthur, Vivien is a shape-
shifter who has more than one name and persona. She is Nimuë, Morgan le Faye, and one of

195<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/MVessay.htm>
the several spirits who make up the composite Lady of the Lake. As she does in Cameron’s book, Vivien takes Merlin prisoner at the beginning of Malory’s Morte, demonstrating that Arthur’s court can survive quite well without the aid of magic, prophecy, and "the old way" – Merlin’s way – of doing things (Goodrich 15).

Woolf portrays the playwright-director La Trobe as a female artist in the mold of Cameron and the older Vivien: a creative, rebellious woman, not inherently evil. She possesses a boundary-bursting imagination, a mysterious past, and an exotic personality. A positive force, she defies convention and helps to builds the community which she serves. By condensing their work into small scenes and minor parts in her pageant, La Trobe takes the spotlight off the “father poets” and uses her magic to make space for other voices and other roles on stage. Woolf’s La Trobe, like Vivien an incarnation of Anon, the ageless author and mother of all orphaned works, is a powerful asset to the community.

In her second Illustrations photograph (fig. 14), Vivien casts a paralyzing spell over the master magician. Cameron’s readers, looking at the photo, would have come away with a softened impression of Vivien, not only from the appearance of the young woman in the white dress, but also through the strategic selection of verse that Cameron chose to accompany her images:

For Merlin, overtalk’d and overworn,

Had yielded, told her all the charm and slept.

Then in one moment, she put forth the charm

Of woven paces and of waving hands,

And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,

And lost to life and use and name and fame.

(Ricks 3: 422, ll.963-8)
The charm, the ultimate Spell of Making, is performance art executed by Vivien through her intricate steps, gestures, and vocal incantation. Cameron ends the lithographed excerpt here, leaving out Tennyson’s next four harshly judgmental lines in which the forest joins Vivien, the treacherous whore, by echoing her epithet for Merlin for emphasis:

Then crying ‘I have made his glory mine,’
And shrieking out ‘O fool!’ the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed ‘fool’

(Ricks 3: 422, ll.969-972)

The photographic Vivien does not exult over her usurpation of Merlin’s spells or consequent humiliation of him, as the poetic Vivien does in Tennyson’s idyll. The Illustrations are more about female creativity and independence than womanly treachery and lawlessness. They exclude Tennyson’s themes of male violence and courtly love, thus refusing to represent the traditional values of Arthurian chivalry. Though there are several evil characters in the Idylls, there are no true villains portrayed in the Illustrations.

Merlin presides over the first illustration of “Merlin and Vivien” (fig. 12). In the second photo (fig. 14), things are reversed. Vivien is standing closer to the camera and Charles Cameron, a small man to begin with, is placed downstage, farther away. This use of perspective makes Merlin seem diminutive. His vulnerability is emphasized by his voluminous cloak, which, apparently borrowed for the occasion, is much too big for him. The large white strip of furry trim down the front, taken up at the oversized hem of his robe, suggests a recent shrinkage in his stature. The balance of power between the two figures
has shifted, a fact borne out by the reversal of names in the titles: Tennyson’s title, "Merlin and Vivien," appears on the verso as a title above each lithographed excerpt, while Cameron’s reversal of it, "Vivien and Merlin," appears on the recto as a caption for each of the illustrations (figs. 12 & 14).

While casting her spell on Merlin, Vivien assumes the posture of the photographer herself, as if sizing him up as a potential sitter. In lieu of a camera, her index finger is pointed at his head – in a posture that the twentieth-century viewer would recognize as a visual pun on the *indexical* correlation of image to actuality.196 Along this line of sight her vision of him is the scene’s definitive vector, tracing the line of her influence through her pointed finger as if through a weapons-grade camera lens. Dressed in gauzy white, she appears to float above the ground. His dark columnar figure, rhyming visually with the great oak trunk behind him, seems rooted in the ground, a miniature replica of the hollow tree that will soon be his prison.

That Charles Hay Cameron nearly undermined the scene with his uncontrollable laughter makes his wife’s ultimate power to arrest and reverse his subversion all the more triumphant. He had often expressed his objection to his wife’s photography on the grounds of its expense, complaining that Juley was “carving up” their Dimbola estate in Ceylon (B. Hill 97). Cameron silenced and preserved him whole as a still subject in her photography, keeping a cooperative and well-behaved version of her husband, imprisoned along with Tennyson and Merlin, in the images she made in her studio.197 Charles directed the coffee plantations on the eastern island of Ceylon, his Dimbola, while on western Isle of Wight Dimbola was largely governed by Cameron.

[196] This insight is pointed out by Carol Armstrong (*Scenes in a Library* 369).

[197] Cameron’s expenses were considerable. She wrote to Sir John Herschel that “When I started photography I hoped it might help me in the education of one of my Boys. I soon found that its outlay doubled its returns so that it became a duty to me to recover my expenditure.” (28 January 1866, Library of the Royal Society, London).
For Woolf, the apotheosis of independent creativity was the figure of "Anon," who, in her incarnation as Miss La Trobe, like Cameron, remains a hidden artist. Cameron worked behind her camera, never appearing in her photographs, though she is always present in them through her influence; La Trobe directs the pageant from the bushes or behind a tree, remaining concealed off stage throughout the performance. Both, descendants of Anon, use their actors to create their theatrical visions, leaving only "picture post cards behind" (CE 4: 67) after the performance is over. Through the exaggerated, kitschy nature of their productions, filled with interruptions and asynchronous acts which preclude the possibility of a unified effect, both women's work defeats expectations of plot and allows ample space for the audience's imagination to flourish. La Trobe and Cameron forfeit the option of leaving behind prescriptive myths to live by. Their performances do not incorporate parabolic tales encoding behavioral lessons, as do the Arthurian myths. Their legacy is democratic, fluid, individualized, not codified.

Though as invisible as Woolf's La Trobe during the pageant she directs, Cameron's influence appears in each of the photographs throughout the Illustrations, making her presence manifest through the choice of setting, props, costumes, and the responsive demeanor of the players who act out each of the scenes. The clearest example of this can be seen in "Mariana" (fig. 46), where the young woman described as "aweary" in Tennyson's poem, looks as if she is becoming irritated, her patience apparently wearing thin, probably due to Cameron's ministrations and manipulations. Her hair has been tussled by an invisible
hand, her sleeve folded back to reveal her arm, and she has been perched uncomfortably on the arm of a big carved chair – a prop that appears in several other *Illustration* photos. She glares off to the left, sulkily avoiding eye contact with Cameron's lens. Rather than thinking “I would that I were dead,” as does Tennyson's poetic Mariana, this Mariana seems to be ruefully wishing that the photographer were dead.\(^{198}\) The scene is bristling with rebellious energy; there is none of the languid, overripe paralysis that permeates Tennyson's poem.

During the pageant in *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe directs the actors from her hiding place behind a tree or in the bushes (BTA 80), where she signals the music (BTA 122), and keeps tab on the action, coaches the players to speak more loudly (BTA 139), anguishing over the audience's lost attention and the petering out of the illusion (BTA 140, 154, & 180). Though she remains invisible, every scene of the pageant bears the imprint of her presence.

**Culinary Theatre and Heroic Legend**

La Trobe's play and Cameron's book of photographs each display aspects of ordinary life in a rural village. Tennyson, as spokesperson for the nation, was charged with the composition of official verse for his homeland. His voice became increasingly more magisterial after he became Laureate in 1850, through the fulfillment of his job of commemorating people and events of national significance, including the story of his country's origin. As Cameron observed with great respect, “noble are the teachings of one whose word has become a text to the nations” (*Annals* 1). The nation saw itself in Tennyson's poetry. Merlin's private Gleam ultimately issued as public text.

\(^{198}\) It has been pointed out to me by Martin Meisel that Cameron's portrait appears to be more the likeness of Shakespeare's Mariana than Tennyson's.
As the poet narrator of "The Epic" observes, "a truth/ Looks freshest in the fashion of the day" (Ricks 2:2, ll.31-2). In Tennyson’s Arthuriad, the ancient tales are dressed in Victorian garb. They could provide pleasure, guidance and inspiration for the populace because they were apposite to their time. Tennyson’s Arthur, “the apotheosis of chivalry,” functioned as a secular saint firmly rooted in the early Middle Ages of British history, though appearing in the guise of “a troubled Victorian gentleman at the heart of a middle-class national epic” (Gilmour 50). The Idylls present a version of Arthur’s kingdom full of heroic dignity and glory.

The players of the Illustrations and Between the Acts, in contrast, create performances that rewrite the official, received version of history. Their less dignified scenes turn the audience’s attention to the uneven patchwork of performances made by villagers acting with props and costumes constructed with repurposed household articles and leftover materials. Woolf reiterates the necessity of deriving nourishment from “scraps, orts, and fragments,” throughout the novel, suggesting that daily life’s nourishment is composed of bits and pieces which can be transformed with artful skill. That, in the end, it seems to say, is all we have and all that we ultimately are.

La Trobe’s Omnivorous Sorcery

The performance of Cameron’s theatrical scenes and La Trobe’s pageant play depend on good weather conditions and can be understood in fundamentally photographic

199 “The Epic” is the opening section of the frame tale of the "Morte d’Arthur", Tennyson’s first attempt at writing about Arthur. The poet Everard Hall relates the poem on Christmas eve to his friends at a party. He tells the story during the night, symbolically greeting sunrise on Christmas morning with hope, looking forward to the return of the once and future king.
terms as the fruit of concentrated focus on the part of their creators. The pageant takes place in sunshine on the lawn outside Pointz Hall; the photographs of the Illustrations also “took place” outside, as the photographs needed the sun’s rays to make images appear on the glass plates in the studio and on the lawn outside Dimbola. Cameron’s “spell,” powered by her intense concentration and commitment, enabled her to persevere in materializing her vision in spite of the obstacles and limitations of her life and craft. Woolf’s women of vision – Ivimey and La Trobe – in “The Searchlight” and Between the Acts respectively, become so deeply involved in transmitting their scenes to the audience that the strength of their desire alone seems to enable them to triumph over limitations and interruptions, transmitting moments of ephemeral imagery.

Like Cameron’s photography, Ivimey’s pivotal vision in “The Searchlight,” occurs briefly, is captured through a lens and within a circumscribed visual frame, as if being caught through a camera. In Between the Acts, the final scene of La Trobe’s pageant, “The Present. Ourselves” (BTA 179), the audience’s image is reflected back to itself as if it were being photographed. Used to being viewers, not subjects, the audience members are disturbed by the sudden reversal and protest when seeing images of themselves caught in the unequal, voyeuristic relationship of photographer to sitter: “But that’s cruel” they think, “To snap us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume...And only, too, in parts...That’s what’s so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (BTA 184).

There is a culinary dimension to the spells wrought by these artists. La Trobe, sorceress, like Cameron, takes pieces from the works literature of the past and “seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world” (BTA 153). Her domestically-originated spells are cooked up on the grounds of the manor house, like the egg-white smeared paper that the photographer used to fix her magical prints on the lawn of Dimbola. Their theatrical endeavors were
culinary in a literal as well as theoretical sense (Benjamin 1968, 147). Cameron became distraught when her amateur theatricals failed to captivate her audience, whether on stage or paper; so too does Miss La Trobe experience a kind of death “when illusion fails” (BTA 180).

*In Between the Acts*, the transformation happens both on stage and also in the audience, in response to the pageant’s power, when the audience comes together and separates at various depths, intricacies, and velocities. The performance unites the audience, sustaining its power, reintegrating the atomized individuals, overcoming interruptions and other disconnections. Woolf vividly expresses the experience by piling up images of color, texture, and sound expressing the human, natural, and mythic dimensions they inhabit:

> Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. [...] On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind’s immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder; To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. (BTA 189)

The play releases the “whole population of the mind’s immeasurable profundity,” enabling the dawn of a new era, a new soundtrack to life seemingly more possible every minute. The “warring, battle-plumed warriors” at the depths of the musical score that animates the drama are representatives of the past ages of warring knights, beginning with the Round Table and proceeding through the twentieth-century military knights who are ultimately harmonized into wholeness in this passage. They threaten to come apart, to fall into oblivion, but just before their disappearance into “appalling crevasses,” return to crash and unite in a peaceful “solved” whole. The chaos and fragmentation within and among the
audience members is ultimately healed, albeit temporarily, through the magic spell of the performance.\footnote{Woolf was writing a short story called “The Symbol” about the fragility of life while she finished 	extit{Between the Acts}: in it a team of mountain climbers disappears silently and instantly into a crevasse as the narrator watches. There are echoes of this crashing, sudden disappearance in the passage quoted above.}

\section*{Domestic Creativity}

Lindsay Smith points out that the word “focus” has the same lexical root as “hearth,” thus reaffirming the domestic roots of Cameron’s work and suggesting that Cameron gendered her focus female by deliberately “unfocusing” her lens to achieve her signature misty effects.\footnote{Her chapter on Cameron is entitled “This Old House” in 	extit{The Politics of Focus: Feminism and Photography Theory} (35).} Such etymological heritage re-emphasizes the location of Cameron’s creativity, which, like the creativity of Woolf’s playwright, lay within the geographic sphere of the domestic stage.

La Trobe worked her transformations on the lawn outside the main house of Pointz Hall, close to the center of the family’s life, as did Woolf, whose writing lodge behind Monk’s House provided the sheltering privacy and quiet in which she wrote 	extit{Between the Acts}. Cameron worked a transformation in her home worthy of a sorceress: she appropriated “a glazed fowl house” from her children, she tells us in her autobiography, in which “the society of hens and chickens was soon changed for that of poets, prophets, painters and lovely maidens” (\textit{Annals} 3). Rather than changing men into swine like Circe, Cameron exchanged fowl for Victorian heroes, great men who “immortalized the humble little farm erection” in which she worked. Cameron’s glass house had once been filled with birds that produced the eggs she used both for profit and for domestic economy. It continued to be
associated with female productivity, as Cameron used the albumen of the hens’ eggs to coat the paper for her photographs. She may not ultimately have brought in as much steady monetary remuneration selling her photographs as her children had in selling their eggs, but they have earned much regard from the public. Her efforts were recognized widely over the world in the next century for their lasting aesthetic, historical, and literary value. Though not always fully appreciated in her own time, Cameron’s images have recently been described in terms she would have approved, and might herself have used to characterize her work: “unique and irreproducible” (Heyert 117), “powerful” (Marsh 6), “spiritual” (Armstrong 395), and “fascinating” (Fry 23).

Cameron refashioned Dimbola and its outbuildings for the production of her art, creating an arrangement nearly contiguous to the one in which Tennyson composed his poems, written in a studio on the top floor of Farringford. According to Leslie Stephen, Tennyson’s home looked “as if it had been secreted, like the shell of a mollusc, by the nature of the occupant” (1902, 2:218). The Laureate composed the bulk of the *Idylls* at Farringford; England’s other influential Arthuriad, *Le Morte d’Arthur*, had been written by Malory while in prison in a cell of his own four centuries earlier.

The women in Tennyson’s poems also practiced their creativity at home -- Elaine embroidered her shield cover in a tower and Princess Ida presided over her university in a castle of her own. Cameron’s Dimbola, with its crenellated towers, resembles a small castle (fig. 92). Not many miles down the road from Dimbola stands Osborne House – the summer workplace of Queen Victoria – another site of female productivity. In contrast to these quasi-domestic workplaces, by the end of her life, Woolf’s preference for a site of creativity had evolved from the isolation of a room of her own to the gathering place of the community playhouse.
Beginnings

“Gareth and Lynette”

The Nightbird Opens Our Ears

The first literary photograph in Volume One of Cameron’s *Illustrations* is “Gareth and Lynette,” a romantic image of clear vision. It is the beginning of the twelve-part cycle of the *Idylls*, and in its setting and mood, the photo evokes another beginning: the first scene of *Between the Acts*. Woolf described the inspiration for the frame tale of the novel in her diary as a rustic idyll: “Last night I began making up again: summer’s night: a complete whole: that’s my idea” (D 5:133). Cameron’s photograph portrays a midsummer evening in the country, a liminal moment that expands as dusk falls gently, the whole world at peace.

Woolf captured the mood in her descriptive sketch “The Moment: a Summer’s Night” (CE 2: 293-7), the typescript drafts of which were found mixed together with the draft pages of *Between the Acts* and “Ellen Terry” after her death. In this sketch, Woolf describes the brief time between day and night when stillness descends in crepuscular softness. The words of the essay seem to spread out from a center point, like the lantern’s rays that gently illuminate the scene in “The Moment.” Woolf observes later in the essay, as if referring to Cameron and Miss La Trobe’s theatrical productions, “we are spectators and passive participants in a pageant” (CE 2: 293), her a metaphor for life. As spectators and passive participants, we “receive a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower” ("Modern
Fiction,” CE 3: 35). The opening scenes of Between the Acts, the Idylls, and the Illustrations all take place in a rural, Edenic midsummer night, showering impressions on the audience.

The first photograph of Volume One of the Illustrations, “Gareth and Lynette” (fig. 6), shows a couple ensconced in a honeysuckle bower. The image demonstrates Cameron’s technique of filling a narrative tableau as fully as possible with an abundance of detail while softening the edges of the photograph by gently rubbing the negative so that the image fades out at the margins.

The setting of Tennyson’s idyllic scene is peaceful and romantic, the fragrant honeysuckle framing the figures acts as a metaphor for the ripening sweetness of the couple’s relationship. Cameron emphasizes the importance of the honeysuckle in her photograph, maintaining her characteristically rigorous botanical accuracy. As onlookers we are placed in the position of the unseen Lancelot, whom Lynette addresses, observing how hard it is to find the entrance to the cave where they will rest because “[...] all about it flies a honeysuckle. Seek, till we find” (Ricks 3: 319, ll.1246-7), paraphrasing the biblical verse of Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9, with the implication that good things are in the offing and their efforts will be rewarded. In the final lines of Cameron’s excerpt, Lynette exclaims, “Good lord [sic], how sweetly smells the honeysuckle/ In the hushed night, as if the world were one/ Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!” (Ricks 3: 319 ll.1255-7). This moment of bliss marks the highest level of earthly happiness and hope in the Illustrations. In the vine-protected interior of their cave, a prelapsarian earthly paradise opens up to surround the couple, its goodness reified in the fragrant honeysuckle blossoms.

The moment captured by the camera in this first photograph occurs as Lynette suddenly sees through Gareth’s outward appearance to the true nobility of the sleeping knight disguised as a kitchen slave. In the arc of the twelve-part cycle of the Idylls, based on the divisions of twelve hours of the day and months of the year by which natural time cycles
are measured, "Gareth and Lynette" launches the epic on an evening midway through the year, at midsummer. Camelot began in a land of "great tracts of wilderness/ Wherein the beast was ever more and more, / But man was less and less till Arthur came" (Ricks 3: 267, ll. 10-12). Rescued from savagery by Arthur, the world this night is peaceful, whole, and safe.

**Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette"**

In this photo, Cameron shows us the weary and vulnerable Gareth sleeping, while Lynette hovers above him. The change in her character at this pivotal moment is deep. Up until this time Lynette, as a headstrong, impulsive, and impatient young woman, has exploited and abused Gareth's patience and loyalty. Now he and she both take on new roles: Gareth throws off his greasy scullion costume, revealing himself to be a noble knight, and Lynette, presumably made tender by love for him, relinquishes her spoiled and selfish behavior to become a mature and loving woman – "[…] Seem I not as tender to him/ As any mother? Ay, but such a one/ As all day long hath rated at her child, / And vexed his day, but blesses him asleep--" (Ricks 3: 319, ll.1251-4). It is a visual turning point equal to the transformative scene Henry Taylor spies through his telescope.

In Malory's 1485 version of this Idyll, Gareth slays his opponents through good fortune and by taking unfair advantage of them, in what seems a parody of chivalric knighthood (Ricks 3: 313, n.1015-31). Tennyson's Gareth is a heroic knight who, when he first comes to Camelot, learns his chivalric standards from Arthur:

"[…] my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King”

(Ibid ll.541-4)

Living up to Arthur’s standards, Gareth wins Lynette.

The first photograph of the Illustrations reminds us that word “idyll” is derived from the Greek *eidyllion*, or “little picture,” and that it refers to a short poem descriptive of country life. In Cameron’s image a voluptuous arrangement of velvet, silk, fur, and hair is framed by vegetation artfully situated to resemble a cave, hardly a simple scene of country life. Gareth is dressed in fine clothing suitable for a nobleman but too luxurious to be the attire of a kitchen slave. In the poem he is given armor and a horn by Arthur, not attired in rich fabric.

**Cameron’s “Gareth and Lynette”**

A betrothed couple, Cameron’s niece May (Mary Emily) Prinsep – Sara Prinsep’s adopted daughter – and her fiancé Andrew Kinsman Hitchens, posed for this photograph in the summer of 1874. Prinsep and Hitchens were married by the time the book was published. Her hand on his chest, May gazes maternally at her fiancé, in much the same way that Cameron’s madonnas lean over their sleeping infants, or the grieving Mary regarded her son after his death. Carol Armstrong has famously characterized Cameron’s relationship to photography as maternal (1996, 114-141); this image conveys Lynette’s motherly instinct.
The lines of the couple’s bodies come together at an acute angle, their heads pointing to the enveloping crescent-shaped enclosure of honeysuckle. Lynette’s hair, flowing over her trailing gown – borrowed from Cameron’s wardrobe for the occasion – extend in a straight line from the crown of her head to below her waist, beyond the bend in her body that we know must be there as a necessary support for her upper body. Lynette’s tenuous posture suggests the impossibility of maintaining this idyllic scene for long: the harmony and peace established by Arthur in Camelot was already in jeopardy. The couple’s marriage, which took place a few weeks after the photograph was taken, lasted until Hitchens’ death in 1918. Widowed, May later wed Hallam Tennyson. Two notable features of Gareth’s appearance in this photograph cause him to appear especially vulnerable: the protruding vein in his forehead, accentuated by the lighting in the studio, which seems to pulse almost visibly, and the pale skin on his exposed arm. The sleeve of Hitchens’ garment has been folded back to reveal an expanse of skin, contrasting with the dark skin of his hand, indicating that he has spent considerable time out of doors. His tanned skin seems to document Gareth’s stint as a kitchen worker for Sir Kay the Seneschal, who nicknamed him “Beaumains,” apparently for his protected, aristocratic hands, which appear coarsened by toil in this photograph. The contrast of the darkened hand with the fine, pale skin above his wrist indicates his dual literary role as nobleman and servant as well as his rural life in Freshwater Bay. Gareth’s exposed forearm is an expanse of masculine flesh unique in Cameron’s photography.

In this first image, Cameron shows us a woman studying a man rendered temporarily vulnerable and unable to return her gaze. She has reversed the expected order

---

202 Both Hallam and his older brother Lionel took part in Cameron’s amateur theatrics. Lionel is the model for Robin, the male lead in “The May Queen” in Volume Two (fig. 36).
of a male regarding a vulnerable female. It became a critical commonplace in twentieth-century film theory to regard the camera’s “gaze” as masculine. The photograph of Gareth and Lynette genders it feminine by portraying a woman looking at a man who returns neither her gaze, the gaze of the camera (held by a woman), nor the viewer’s gaze as s/he looks at the completed photograph.

The scene achieves a near opposite effect to that of Henry Peach Robinson’s composite photograph “Fading Away” (1858), that famous example of Victorian narrative photography in which a young woman lies unconscious on a couch, presumably dying, the center of her family’s attention, mourned in advance by her parents and sister. Like the young woman in “Fading Away,” Gareth is the unconscious object of the viewer’s gaze.

**Novel Opening Scenes:**

**Between the Acts and Pointz Hall**

The opening sentence of Woolf’s novel teases the reader, playing with his or her expectations until the last word: “It was a summer’s night, and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool” (BTA 3). The unexpected final noun brings the reader up short. We are forewarned that this summer’s eve is not the

---

203 As already noted in this chapter, Cameron had often set up scenes in which a man looked down on a woman kneeling in front and below him (as in Vivien and Merlin, Friar Laurence and Juliet, and Prospero and Miranda, etc.)

204 Laura Mulvey’s germinal essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (14-28), is the *locus classicus* for the idea of the male gaze, which originated in Lacan’s theory of the development of agency in the mirror stage.

205 “Fading Away” can be seen at: http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/Collection/Photography/RoyalPhotographicSociety/CollectionItem.aspx?id=2003-5001/2/23282
lush, romantic, and peaceful one of “Gareth and Lynette.” We are in a new century, operating under shockingly different rules.

The first person to speak is “a goose-faced woman with eyes protruding as if they saw something to gobble in the gutter” – this novel, though its prose approximates poetry, refuses to glorify its characters or use euphemisms. A cow coughs and a bird chuckles as the nonhuman world joins the conversation. The goose-faced woman, longing for the seductive song of the previous century’s romanticism, suggests that the bird is a nightingale. The narratorial voice corrects her impression: “[n]o, nightingales did not come so far north. It was a daylight bird chuckling over the substance and succulence of the day. Over worms, snails, grit, even in sleep.” Hopes for hearing the melodious song of the nightingale are dashed at the outset. Yet, having been introduced on the first page, the nightingale stays on as a ghostly presence haunting the reader’s mind. The novel flirts with our romantic expectations, even after the nightbird on page one is revealed to be a common day bird.

The nightingale plays a key part in Tennyson’s idyll “The Marriage of Geraint,” which Cameron illustrates under the title “Geraint and Enid” (figs. 8 & 10). Enid’s voice is compared to a nightingale’s (fig. 10, “And Enid Sang”). It captivates Geraint, turning him from a stalwart knight into a homesick uxorious homebody. As a “lander” he has become firmly attached to the earth rather than sea or sky. In contrast, in Between the Acts, Woolf invokes the nightingale’s transformative song only to dismiss it. The reader will not hear the seductive “evasions of the nightingale” in Woolf’s modernist book: the romantic sublime remains out of reach, apparently one of the prohibited luxuries of wartime England.206

Woolf opened the first typescript draft of the novel, Pointz Hall, with a mock-heroic invocation called “Prayer to the Nightbird.” It is neither the nightingale nor a powerful

---

206 Another modernist, Wallace Stevens, in his sonnet “Autumn Refrain,” realizes he will never hear the song of the nightingale in New Haven, but must settle for the screech and scritter of the grackle.
Homeric or Virgillian muse to whom she prays to inspire her epic, even at the romantic midnight hour, but to a little nondescript, anonymous fowl:

Not to the nightingale, the amorous, the expressive, do we turn [in this crisis] praying to be released from the herring and the council houses; for they sing of death, the nightingales; but to some little anonymous bird of daylight, who, thinking to sleep, has woken; a sociable fowl; who, shuffled in the angle of the apple tree, can't sleep; his wings want stretching; [...] Off he flits, wise and honest bird; not afraid of saying snail shells, pebbles, little bits of parsley; worms; slugs; slime! They have, he chuckles and chatters, still their substance and succulence, even at midnight.

(Pointz Hall 34)

[Woolf’s editing symbols have been retained as they appear in Mitchell Leaska’s redaction of the text.]

This anonymous little bird collects the “scraps, orts, and fragments” that appear throughout the novel (BTA 188, 189, 192). The bird finds in these humble bits, the greasy leftovers, sufficient “substance and succulence,” to chuckle over. La Trobe and Cameron similarly hunt and dig up humble quotidian materials as they turn them into props and costumes. Odd pieces provide them with substance for the setting for their “succulent” scenes.

The little bird invoked at the outset of Woolf’s mock-epic is called upon to do more than release us from the trivial details that clutter daily life; he is asked to open our senses, to

[...] come, and tweak and twitter and free our long ears clutted [sic] up with fur; in which dust that no housemaid can broom away has lodged; tweak us awake this jocund night of early summer and remind us of the [cold] <grass> under our feet; [of our nakedness;] how the sole of the foot and all the skin is bare, and the hairs are still capable of sensation; while our tongues shape the smoke in our brains into talk about herring and cesspools. (PH 35)

207 Woolf was reading Troilus and Cressida in October of 1938, during the time she began work on Between the Acts (VW Chronology 201). The quotation has significance for her method of writing and her philosophical (ontological) stance in the novel.
The mention of “our long ears” evokes the ears of the donkey head Woolf wore when she directed the performance of *Freshwater* for her niece’s sixteenth birthday, reminiscent of Bottom the Weaver’s transformation into an ass in Shakespeare’s play. Applied to this memory, the passage seems to say that her long stage manager’s ears needed to be opened up to take the transformative power of theatre beyond burlesquing her great aunt’s artistic community, to wake up to the possibilities inherent in dramatic performance.

The fabric of our quotidian existence is padded with superficial preoccupations—things like herring, council houses, advantageous marriages, and artificial distinctions among people based on family identity—which hold our attention, insulating, distracting, and robbing us of the keen experience of the present moment. Woolf’s invocation turns admonitory at this point, warning us against the narcotic effects of romanticism and the deadening insulation of trivial distractions. Its advisory tone is possibly why Woolf decided to eliminate the passage from the final version of the novel. The invocation is useful in reading *Between the Acts*, however, in that it indicates that Woolf, like Miss La Trobe and Cameron, believes in discovering a nourishing “substance and succulence” in each day by uncovering its buried creative potential.

**Enid’s Song**

The two photographs pertaining to the story of Enid seem anomalous in the *Illustrations*, as they feature a conventional, obedient wife, and are placed between images of the independent women of the “Gareth and Lynette” and “Merlin and Vivien” idylls. In both photographs (figs. 8 & 10) Enid stands alone. Although his name has equal billing in the idyll’s title, Geraint does not appear in either of the idyll’s illustrations. In the first we
see her standing in front of the “cedaric” cabinet ready to put on her “worst and meanest dress” to go silently on the dangerous journey that her husband has ordered to test her virtue and devotion, and in the second she holds a lute and appears in a lushly rendered portrait, about to sing her stoic song of Fortune’s wheel. As mentioned earlier, the rift in the lute (Ricks 3: 406, ll.388-9) is Tennyson’s metaphor for Vivien’s causing the fall of Arthur’s kingdom; thus the image of Enid holding a lute in this illustration acts as an antidote, associating that instrument with wholesome virtue. Enid’s first encounter with Geraint occurs aurally: he falls in love with her voice even before he meets her. Tennyson compares Enid’s voice to the nightingale’s song:

[...] and as the sweet voice of a bird,  
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,  
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is  
That sings so delicately clear, and make  
Conjecture of the plumage and the form;  
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint;  
And made him like a man abroad at morn  
When first the liquid note beloved of men  
Comes flying over many a windy wave  
To Britain, and in April suddenly  
Breaks from a coppice gemmed with green and red,  
And he suspends his converse with a friend,  
Or it may be the labour of his hands,  
To think or say, ‘There is the nightingale;’  
So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said,  ‘Here, by God’s grace, is the one voice for me.’

(Ricks 3: 334, ll. 329-334)

Though Cameron does not cite these lines, they are implied in explanation for Geraint’s choice of Enid as a mate, or rather as the voice he desires to spend his life with. The sound

---

208 Note that in Cameron’s lithograph of these lines she uses the word “cedaric” rather than Tennyson’s word “cedarn” (MG l.136) in the Enid excerpt (fig. 7). This is one of her creative misquotations of Tennyson’s verse, the most telling one being her misrepresentation of lines from “The Gardener’s Daughter” in her autobiographical fragment, Annals of my Glass House.

209 “[...]the little rift within the lute,  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening slowly silence all”
of Enid’s singing is sanctioned by patriotism in Tennyson’s text; it stands as a metonym for
Geraint’s British home. The sound of the Keatsian nightingale is used by Tennyson as an
intensifier of desire. Geraint swears an oath of loyalty and possession, inspired by Enid’s
voice. Heard in the freshness of an early spring morning, blowing in off the sea, it is an
unidentified voice singing a homely song that is immediately familiar as the voice of the
motherland. Anon’s first poems, similarly inspired by the music of birds, are not apposite to
Britain or to any particular species.

Tennyson frequently compared women’s singing to birdsong. In 1866 he wrote a
song cycle based on Heinrich Heine’s poetry called “The Window; or, The Song of the
Wrens” at the request of Sir Arthur Sullivan, who wrote music for it. This helped the
composer’s career in much the same way that Cameron had hoped Tennyson’s fame would
help publicize her Illustrations. “The Window” was to be illustrated by John Everett Millais,
who managed to complete only one painting of the series. “The Window,” like the Idylls,
comprised twelve parts (Ricks 2: 697-704). Never acquiring favor with the public, it
remained in memory an embarrassment to Tennyson.

The Story of Cameron’s Enid

The model for Enid in the Illustrations photos is Emily Peacock, whom Cameron had
used previously as an actor for “The Angel in the House,” in her illustration of Coventry
Patmore’s poem. Peacock also sat for the three photos in “The May Queen” sequence in the
following year (figs. 34, 36, & 38). In the last image in that series, “The End,” Emily wears
the same costume as in Cameron’s portrait of her as “Ophelia” in distress (fig. 86). The
range of emotions expressed in these photos of Peacock forms a continuum from the
obedient Enid and Angel to the wayward Ophelia and May Queen. A similar multiple role-
playing expansion of character is at work in Between the Acts when Lucy Swithin appears “like a tragic figure from another play” (BTA 214) and again when she comments that the pageant made her realize her “unacted part” as Cleopatra (BTA 153). Woolf implies throughout the novel that at least one other play is simultaneously at work, layered beneath the day at Pointz Hall, influencing each moment.

Tennyson adapted his two Enid Idylls from Lady Charlotte Guest’s translation of the Mabinogion, to which they adhere faithfully, adding Enid’s song and Geraint’s request that she prepare for the journey by putting on her “worst and meanest dress.” But both of Cameron’s illustrations of Enid are of purely Tennysonian inspiration, accurate realizations of scenes from his poetry, and not derived from the Mabinogion or any other source. Fittingly, perhaps, the two Idylls that make up Enid’s story are the only ones for which a manuscript version exists written in Emily Tennyson’s hand, connecting the angelic Enid with Tennyson’s own domestic Angel. Of all the Idylls, Enid’s story is the most domestic and novelistic.

The Birds of the Illustrations

The Nightingale and Swallow:

Philomela and Procne

By choosing to illustrate the Idylls of Elaine and Enid, Cameron invokes the ancient myth of Philomela and Procne, the sisters who were turned into birds by Zeus for their protection. The myth of Procne and Philomela provides a way of organizing the stories of

---

210 Emily’s handiwork in transcribing the poetry is noted by John Pfordresher in the introduction to his variorum edition of the Idylls (xxvii).
the female characters in the *Illustrations*, emphasizing the sisterly relationships that both Cameron and Woolf prized, and illuminating another layer of meaning in the appearance of birds in the *Illustrations* and *Between the Acts*. On the shield cover she embroiders for Lancelot, Elaine represents herself as the “yellow-throated nestling,” a reclusive swallow-artist like Procne, also maker of a woven artifact (figs. 16, 18, & 50). Enid, the nightingale singer, appears to be cast as Philomel. Tennyson originally paired these two characters, Enid and Elaine, which he called in the 1859 versions of the *Idylls*, “the true” women of Camelot, in contrast to “the false” Vivian and Guinevere.

**Ovid’s Myth**

The story of Philomela and Procne provides a subtext for the *Illustrations*, as it does for Woolf’s novel: several critics have written about this myth as a recurrent theme in *Between the Acts*. In Ovid’s account of the story Procne, the wife of King Tereus, is cast aside by her husband when he hears her younger sister Philomela sing and falls in love with Philomela’s beautiful voice. Tereus spreads the rumor that Procne has died, meanwhile holding her prisoner. Procne’s father, feeling sorry for the widower, gives him Philomela’s hand in marriage. Tereus, having raped Philomela, stages a false marriage and brings her home to his palace to live as his new Queen. When Procne hears this news she begins to object vociferously, Tereus has her tongue cut out to keep her silent. In captivity she makes a bridal robe for her sister, weaving into it a secret message that tells her story, advising

---


However, Frank Kermode, in his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of the novel, (NY: 1992), terms the application of the myth to *Between the Acts* as an example of “all manner of irrelevant fancies” (xv) that have been applied to interpret it.
Philomela that “Procne is among the slaves.” Philomela goes to the slave quarters to rescue her sister, and upon breaking down the locked door to her room, finds her chattering unintelligibly and running around in circles like a swallow. Philomela and Procne murder Itylus, the son of Procne and Tereus, as revenge on Tereus. The gods intervene at this point and turn all three into birds. Procne becomes a swallow, Philomela a nightingale, and Tereus a hawk.

This well-known story of sisters may actually have originated in a misinterpretation of some ancient illustrations. Robert Graves observes that the myth was probably created over four hundred years before Ovid’s tale, “to account for a series of Thraco-Pelasgian wall-paintings, found by Phocian invaders in a temple at Daulis,” (ca. 492 BCE) made to illustrate different methods of prophecy in local use. Graves points out that the Greek version of the myth is based on a radical misreading of the paintings. The cutting-out of Procne’s tongue is based on a scene showing a prophetess in a trance induced by the chewing of laurel leaves, her face contorted with ecstasy, not pain. The weaving of Procne’s letters into the bridal robe comes from misunderstanding another scene, this one showing a priestess reading a handful of oracular sticks cast on a white cloth, fallen into the shape of letters. The story of Procne’s transformation into a swallow is the result of misreading a third scene showing a priestess in a feathered robe taking auguries from the flight of a swallow (Graves, I: 167). To make the story even more complex in its evolution, further re-tellings of the myth assign the role of the singing sister to Procne and the voiceless sister to Philomela, a reversal which adds extra dimensions and elasticity to the application of the story as an interpretive tool. Like the Arthurian legends, the story of Philomela and Procne, springing from a few mysterious facts, evolved into a well-known cultural archetype. Graves’ account of the misinterpretation of the aim of the cave paintings furnishes us with an example of how
layers of retellings can radically affect the evolution of a story over millennia, even such a simple one as this, involving the bond of sisterly loyalty.

The Procne and Philomela “sister myth” reflects an important aspect of Cameron and Woolf’s life stories, as both of them were close to their sisters and dependent on them in their daily lives for many necessities, including the flowering of their talents. Vanessa Bell’s artwork, the founding of the Omega Workshop, her influence in helping Virginia remember their familial past, and the book covers she designed for her sister, as well as her sensitive and devoted care, grounded Woolf and helped to launch and maintain her writing career. Similarly, Cameron’s close relationship to her sisters motivated and anchored her artistic career. She created her first album on behalf of the invalided Mia Jackson, the mother of Virginia Woolf. Scholar Eugenia Parry Janis suggests that Mia’s handicapped condition motivated Cameron to maintain the demanding schedule necessary to make photographs, many of which she ultimately gave to her sister, as if co-sharing with her the joy of its creation (Janis 9). Cameron’s involvement with another sister, Sara Prinsep, through the artistic and literary salons they hosted together, both in Kensington and the Isle of Wight, opened a network of connections for her, clinching sitters for many of her famous “big head” portraits.

Ovid’s sister myth functions differently in the Illustrations, where it underlies the characterization of women as artists or angels, like Elaine and Enid. In Between the Acts it evolves into something more subtly complicated and mutable – signified by the multiplicity of the birds in the novel and how they function throughout.
Before going on to explore how Cameron’s photographic *Illustrations* relate to the ancient myth of the nightingale and swallow, it helps to understand Enid from another critical perspective, to examine how she can be seen as both heroine and hero in the *Idylls*.

Maureen Fries applies a schema to the women of the Arthurian legends that divides them on the basis of the kind of “heroism” they display. In an effort to recuperate the submissive Enid as an independent and strong woman, an Arthurian “heroine” who becomes a “hero” in the course of her story, she finds compensatory qualities in her behavior under stress. At the outset, Enid displays the traditional passive womanly characteristics of a “heroine:” Fries describes her as “instrument, and not an agent: the still point around which the real action (of the male universe) turns” (64). Her virtues are “those universally recommended to medieval women in real life: chastity, obedience, silence” (64). This constellation of traits happens to name the crucial female virtues Woolf describes in *Three Guineas*, though she defines them quite differently in her twentieth-century wartime milieu. Obedience and silence are elided by Woolf, and two independent virtues: “derision,” and “freedom from unreal loyalties” (TG 119) added, comprising a very different and more demanding set of values for the twentieth-century.

Then, according to Fries, Enid the “heroine” becomes Enid the “hero” through her “loyal and loving disobedience” and her “assertion of real female prowess” on the journey that she and Geraint take together (65). During this challenging trip, Enid proves her affection and good judgment by defying the medieval wife’s expected submission to the male command. In repeated though forbidden speech, she warns [her husband] of danger and treachery, allowing him to
conquer numerous robber knights [... Enid] further performs incidental, nonheroinic actions such as watching their horses while her husband sleeps and subsisting like a male in the forest, without the lady’s usually requisite servants (Ibid 66).

It is Geraint’s unfounded suspicion of Enid that allows her the opportunity to act independently and use her good judgment to the point of defying his commands. After she gains his approval, his kiss transforms her back into a “good wife,” prized for her beauty and nurturing skills, no longer able to exercise her independence of spirit and cleverness. She loses her freedom and disappears into what Woolf calls “the shadow of the private house” (TG 22, 93, ff.) which imprisons women with “its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity” (TG 58). Fries’ conception of Enid as a hero indexes the extent to which the sharply curtailed options available to a medieval wife were still operative a millennium after the writing of the original narrative. Enid’s brief opportunity to rise from heroine to hero depends on chance, and is a result of her husband’s hurt pride. For most of the idyll, after marrying Geraint, Enid, the nightingale, is silent. Though Cameron might have seen Enid as heroic, Woolf likely did not.

Elaine’s Handiwork

Tennyson has been identified in the critical heritage with the Lady of Shallott – a reclusive artist and solitary weaver of poetry, a precursor to his Elaine, who also sits alone embroidering in her tower. Cameron sharply disassociates her photographic version of
Elaine from the figure of Tennyson. Her photos emphasize the artistic aspects of both Elaine and Vivien’s roles. She transmutes both women into creative artists, repudiating Tennyson’s characterization of Vivien’s malicious, manipulative harlotry and Elaine’s masochistic insistence on suffering, as they are portrayed in the *Idylls*.

Vivien is a “counter-hero” in Fries’ schema, for liberating herself from the bonds of the patriarchal society in which she lives, and thus being able to move about freely, taking up an autonomous position through magic and cunning. She openly refuses to play a supportive role in a knightly drama, maintaining her part as a leading lady. As a powerful, independent enchantress, she alters her place in the world by her direct action rather than cooperation with patriarchy. Elaine, the artist who embroiders a biography in Lancelot’s shield cover, is a classic “heroine” in Tennyson and Fries’ versions of her story. She furthers the plot, adopting a mostly passive role. In addition to her embroidery, Elaine achieves retaliation through her posthumous letter and appearance in court, having been rejected by Lancelot.

However, Elaine plays a starring role in the *Illustrations*, appearing in more photographs than any other woman (figs. 16, 18, 50 & 52); equal in number to Arthur’s (figs. 24, 28, 52, & 54). She upstages Arthur in her death scene (fig. 52), the only photo in which they appear together. Elaine and Vivien both possess positive, creative powers in the photos, though Tennyson designates them as moral opposites in the *Idylls*. “Elaine the fair,

---

212 The popular press began to notice the potential for the Lady of Shallott’s affinity with photography about a dozen years after the publication of the *Illustrations*. Adelaide Skeel satirized the Lady’s deadly curse into the accidental destruction of her photographic equipment thusly:

> Poor Lady! We know she never had a positive, but her negatives, as described by the Poet laureate, are most lovely [...] ‘the curse is come upon me,’ she cried, when she saw her best wide angled Morrison lens shivered into a thousand pieces.

(“The Lady of Shallott’s Negatives” in *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 16: December 3, 1886, 626-7; qtd. in Novak 69).

Skeel’s bluntly humorous version of Tennyson fits more comfortably into Woolf’s twentieth century parody of the canon than do Cameron’s representations of Elaine in the *Illustrations*.
Elaine the loveable, / Elaine the lily maid of Astolat” (Ricks 3: 422, ll. 1-2) appears in Tennyson’s epic as the virtuous, reclusive, exploited woman rejected by Lancelot:

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:

His very shield was gone; only the case,

Her own poor work, her empty labour, left,

(Ricks 3: 450, ll.982-4)

In Cameron’s photographic chronicle of Elaine’s story, Lancelot never appears, nor does his shield; the artwork takes precedence over the knight, and the embroidered cover over the shield. In the photographs she is either alone in her tower or dead, and in either state it is her embroidered narrative, not the knight, that matters. In the Illustrations, Elaine’s death is a triumph - she becomes her own cynosure, speaking from beyond the grave through her letter to the court, which is “performed” by Arthur. The lines of poetry Cameron selects to accompany the second photo of Elaine (figs. 17 & 18) describe a paradigm of the process of artistic creativity: “still his picture form’d/ And grew between her and the pictured wall [...]” (Ricks 3: 480 ll.982-4).²¹³ The image of Lancelot in Elaine’s

²¹³ Though Lancelot’s image began to appear on the wall in Elaine’s imagination on the first night he spent at Astolat, banishing sleep, Cameron’s Elaine does not reduplicate the vision of Lancelot that she sees, but embroiders emblems representing herself on the shield cover. In her dream his portrait appears before her:

And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely through 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,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
(Ricks 3: 431-2, ll.329 - 37)
imagination is superseded by the images she embroiders on the shield cover, which is her ultimate work of art.

According to Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, Lancelot’s shield, is “all of sable, and a queen crowned in the midst, all of silver, and a knight clene armed kneeling afore her” (Malory 1 and 12, qtd. in Ricks 1:387). These devices tell the story of Lancelot’s love for Guinevere, and contain a sign of endlessness, the mise en abîme in the reduplication of his shield again and again in the tiny shields held by each of the knights. Each shield contains another knight and shield, on which lies another, even more minuscule knight and shield, and so on, into infinity. This ever-receding image evokes Merlin’s book, with its linked texts going back without end to some unknowable, unreachable origin and reinforces the sense of an ancient female tradition.

Lancelot leaves his shield for safekeeping with Elaine, eager to divest himself of it and to avoid announcing his identity through its emblematic insignia and the souvenirs of the battles and tournaments in which he engaged as a knight, which are marked on it. In Tennyson’s poem, Elaine makes a cover for Lancelot’s shield, on which she embroiders a duplicate of every biographical device painted on it, including two of her own fashioning. She embroiders his life’s story exactly as it appears on his shield, and sews herself into it in the figure of the bird. However, in Cameron’s version of it, the shield cover is a dark square of cloth decorated only by the border of vines and the yellow-throated nestling which Elaine adds as the symbols of her creativity. She tells the story of her own life, excluding all reference to Lancelot. In the photographs, her self-reflexive soft sculpture appears as an autobiographical icon representing herself as a young and vulnerable maiden nestled in her imaginative visions, the mute sister communicating her story to her sisters everywhere through her embroidery. Her nestling and vines are analogous to the shield’s armorial
bearings; they tell the story of her life just as the various devices on his shield recount Lancelot's career as a knight.

The embroidered nestling in photos B16, B18, & B50, Elaine's own specular invention of herself, is an almost exact duplicate of the martlet on the coat of arms of the founder of the Gothic revival. The cadency symbol for a family's fifth son, the martlet appears on A.W.N. Pugin's family crest and in various decorative designs in his home: on floor tiles, mantels, wall coverings, doorway arches, and elsewhere, surrounded by vines. The bird in Elaine's embroidered shield cover, as created by Cameron, is visually a close copy of the bird on the Pugins' coat of arms: both are simple representations of a legless bird on a background design with vines.

For Woolf in Between the Acts, the martlet carries associations to the "temple-haunting martlet" of Macbeth (BTA 182). Also known as the martin or European swallow, the martlet builds its hanging nests in safe nooks high on the walls of tall buildings. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, the martlet is a sign of safety and peace that proves false. In the sixth scene of Act One of the play, Banquo tells the soon-to-be-assassinated Duncan that they have come to a safe place as they arrive at Macbeth's home:

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, doth approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
The air is delicate.

(I.vi.3-10)

Lady Macbeth imagines a raven under her battlements, foretelling the death of the King. Instead, as Duncan looks up at the battlements, he sees martlets gliding to and fro. That night he is murdered under the same roof from which the martlet’s nest hangs.

The martlet, a reminder of doom through breach of trust, is featured by Cameron as the emblem of Elaine’s betrayal by Lancelot. Elaine embroiders the bird as a metaphor for her helplessness; Cameron turns it into a flag which she flies as an emblem of her triumph.

In *Between the Acts*, the swallows that fly everywhere, weaving in and out through the barn and the pageant, are also associated with the ultimate failure of illusion (BTA 182).

**The Birds of Between the Acts:**

**Woolf’s Nightingales and Swallows**

The nightingale on the first page of *Between the Acts*, invoked and then immediately dismissed – silenced like Philomela -- as a material presence, lingers on in the reader’s imagination throughout the novel as a rejection of Keats’s “easeful death.” The swallows appear numerous times throughout the book (BTA 65, 100, 101, 102, 108, 109, 164, 173, 179, 180, 182, 192, 195, & 207), as ubiquitous onlookers, an avian contingent that nests in the barn and appears randomly flying through the landscape of Pointz Hall. The migratorial swallows enact their timeless tradition of return. They are referred to as “temple-haunting martins” by Woolf (BTA 182), prophetic creatures who
have come, have always come [and who seem] to foretell what after all the
Times was saying yesterday. Homes will be built. Each flat with its
refrigerator in the crannied wall. Each of us a free man; plates washed by
machinery; not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated, made whole.

(BTA 182)

In Woolf's modern version of Tennyson's crannied wall, a refrigerator has replaced the
flower that knows of God, an appliance emblematic of the novel's distrust of the concept of
progress. The dream of luxury, freedom and security, called up by Tennyson's poem
combined with the Times's description of an automated modern paradise, is an illusion of
progress; in the novel time repeats itself without improvement. The birds are replaced by
another species of “bird” as Rev. Streatfield addresses the audience after the pageant (BTA
193), at which point the birds have become planes that fly over their heads in formation,
like wild geese, implying that the theatre on the lawn is accompanied by the theatre of war.

The Laughing Yaffle

The chuckling bird that we met on the first page of Between the Acts, invoked as the
muse in the “Prayer to the Nightbird,” turned out not to be a bird of the night after all, but
“some little anonymous bird of daylight.” This chuckling little creature reappears twice later
on in the novel, where it is identified as the yaffle, the laughing, erratic, little woodpecker
whose onomatopoetic name proclaims the sound of its call. “Yaffle” is the folk name for the
European yellow-green woodpecker which shows up suddenly in unlikely places during the
afternoon at Pointz Hall, identifiable by its arresting laugh. The rarely seen yaffle was regarded as a rare gift of delight by Woolf. In the middle of the first entr’acte of the pageant, Isa Oliver, the would-be poet, muses about what her death would cost her:

Should I mind not again to see may tree or nut tree? Not again to hear on the trembling spray the thrush sing, or to see, dipping and diving as if he skimmed the waves in the air, the yellow woodpecker?” (BTA 104)

The little laughing bird is invoked again in the scene of the pageant in which the audience is forced to take the leading role, called “Ourselves: the Present Day.” As the cast comes out with mirrors and “[a]nything that’s bright enough to reflect [...] ourselves,” the little bird helps to provide a soundtrack for the proceedings:

What a cackle, what a rattle, what a yaffle – as they call the woodpecker, the laughing bird that flits from tree to tree. (BTA 183)

Like the playwright-director La Trobe, the anonymous yaffle hides in the bushes, overlooking the afternoon proceedings on the lawn at Pointz Hall, emerging to swoop unpredictably between shrubs. The species *picus viridis*, commonly called “the yaffle,” seems to function in the novel – in addition to being the muse invoked at the opening of its first draft – as a surrogate for the playwright and the author herself. The yaffle also suggests that rare bird, Cameron, who does not sing melodiously like her sisters the beautiful Pattles – but stands aside from the proceedings, directing them invisibly from her hiding place Woolf spied a yaffle while out on a walk during the time she was writing *Between the Acts*, and described the bird as tethering her to earth. The gemlike bird
appeared while Woolf was in the midst of designing her own death. The word "quicken" in the following passage – besides describing an increase in her gait speed, carries the associations of restoring life and bringing her back among the “quick,” as well as feeling new life quickening within:

So I've arranged a very nice last scene; reading Shakespeare, having forgotten my gas mask, I shall fade far away and quite forget\(^{214}\) [...] Today however, to make me quicken my pace, I saw a yellow woodpecker bright green against ruby red willows."

(L 4:467, February 1, 1941)

The yaffle, the independent little bird-muse who watches over the proceedings on the lawn at Pointz Hall, is just one of the convocation of birds that populate the novel. *Between the Acts* is Woolf’s most bird-filled book. There are references and associations in it to several avian species, some in passing -- the planes fly overhead like wild ducks (BTA 193) and the aristocratic old lady in the audience laughs like a jay (BTA 94), others recurring, like the swallows that fly throughout the play and between the acts.

**Starlings and Rooks**

The starlings in the novel appear as a symptom of La Trobe’s creativity, while the rooks function as a metonym for English domesticity, a cawing replacement for the

---

\(^{214}\) “fade far away and quite forget” a line from Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” exemplifies how Woolf flirts verbally with the nightingale throughout the novel and in her thoughts, as if half in love with easeful death herself, yet struggling against it. She resolutely bans the bird from actually appearing in *Between the Acts*. 
melodious but ghostly, prohibited nightingale. The starlings target La Trobe’s tree, the tree that she hides behind during the pageant – which is associated, like the starlings themselves, with her artistic ability. The tree functions as a triumphant counterpart to the hollow oak in which Merlin was imprisoned, allowing La Trobe, an avatar of Vivien, to practice her magic freely behind it. When the pageant starts up again after intermission, the audience observes that

the trees with their many tongued, much syllabling, their green and yellow leaves, hustle and shuffle us, and bid us like the starlings, and the rooks, to come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry (BTA 120).

As surrogates for La Trobe’s voice, both species call out through the rustling leaves: chirping starlings and cawing rooks signal excitement at the play’s recommencement.

Later, after the audience has left, at just the moment La Trobe has concluded with anguish that her pageant is a failure, the pelting birds return to bring a realization of success and glory to her:

Then suddenly the starlings attacked the tree behind which she had hidden. In one flock they pelted it like so many winged stones. The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire. A whizz, a buzz, rose from the bird-buzzing, bird-vibrant rapture, branches, leaves, birds syllabbling discordantly life, life, life, without measure, without stop devouring the tree. (BTA 209)
On the last page of the novel, while La Trobe sits sipping ale in the village pub, dreaming of the next summer's pageant, the riotous starlings suddenly arrive again, attacking the tree in her mind and fertilizing her imagination, enabling her to begin anew, forming the next play in her imagination. She thinks up “words without meaning – wonderful words” and envisions a couple standing alone on earth like Adam and Eve, Arthur and Guinevere, or Giles and Isa, as the tree is pelted with starlings. She hears the first words, and “the play starts over” (BTA 212) in the theatre of her mind. The moment is a positive counterpart to “so dark a forethought” that “roll’d about” Merlin's brain (figs. 11 & 12), ominously warning him of his doom. The fertile forethoughts that arrive in La Trobe’s imagination, in contrast, foretell a new beginning for humanity.

The novel notes that rooks live at Pointz Hall, in a tree above the chimney, into which its smoke curls (BTA 6), confirming that the manor house was built in a hollow when it should have been built high on the hill away from trees and rooks. The rooks rudely point this out by flying above the house, crying out loudly through the novel, calling for the reader’s attention.

That rooks are associated in Woolf’s writing with Englishness is exemplified by the passage in Three Guineas in which the speaker implores the reader

> And if [there remains] some love of England dropped into a child’s ears by the cawing of rooks in an elm tree, by the splash of waves on a beach, or by English voices murmuring nursery rhymes, she will make [it] serve her to give to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world. (TG 166)
The rooks, waves, and murmured nursery rhymes all encompass aspects captured in La Trobe's presentations of English literature. For Woolf, celebrating English heritage while recognizing that Englishness also implied national borders creating imagined communities and “unreal loyalties,” was the novel’s challenge. She hoped that theatrical performance could ultimately “[rub] out divisions as if they were chalk marks only” (TG 143).

Woolf’s feelings for her homeland were multiple, complex, and often contradictory. During the penultimate scene of the pageant, Budge, the Victorian bobby, points towards the house and its rooks, designating them the emblem of “respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria’s land” (172). The Rev. Streatfield shortly afterward appears slightly pathetic as he rises from the audience to deliver his epilogue to the pageant, “[a]s if a rook had hopped unseen to a prominent bald branch, he touched his collar and hemmed his preliminary croak” (190). His speech is interrupted by the formation of fighter planes flying overhead, a predatory group of potentially anti-British silver “birds.”

Open-Ear Reading:

The Consequences of the Daybird’s Chuckle

The little chuckling daylight bird invoked as muse in the “Prayer to the Nightbird” in *Pointz Hall* is asked to vouchsafe us keen hearing, to “tweak us awake.” In order to read skillfully and deeply, according to this invocation, we must remove any muffling protective covering and open our ears. No janitorial aid can help us, Woolf says (PH 35). We must open our ears for ourselves, by looking and listening carefully. Reading with sensitive understanding and insight, i.e. with opened ears, yields aural riches to the reader who dares to take the risk. The protective covering, the fuzz or smoke of daily trivia, allows a layer of
insulation, "the cotton wool of daily life" (MOB 70-74) to muffle sensation and obscure the powerful realities Woolf strives to expose. Being open to the performance of the pageant of life, whether in the community theatre or on the page, means being vulnerable and bare, feeling the cold and noticing the hair on one's neck standing up (PH 35). Choosing to go on this adventure with Woolf means allowing "[t]he whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity [to come] flocking" (BTA 189) forward, no matter what the consequences.

This concept of "open ear reading" is pertinent to the Illustrations and relevant to the musical properties of Tennyson's poetry. The photographs portray many of the poems as songs sung (figs. 10, 18, 26, 34, 36, 38, 42, 44, 48, and 56); thus, at least in these instances, the lithographed words of poetry can be heard subvocally as we look at the images. Barthes likens a photographic image to a "primitive stage." The Illustrations' images provide a platform on which Cameron presents her pageant. While the soothing musical sound of Tennyson's poetry has the power to neutralize the distress conveyed by its subject matter, making the reader more comfortable and able to accept the situations that are presented by the words, Cameron's photographs often do the opposite.

"The Beggar Maid":
Aural Pleasures vs. Visual Realities

Tennyson's poems invite subvocal readings, and though the photographs of the Illustrations appeal to the eye, they are experienced aurally. According to Geoffrey Hartman,

---

215 Linda Hughes provides a thorough discussion of the hierarchy of art, music, and literature in Victorian culture in "Visible Sound and Auditory Scenes." M.H. Abrams' forthcoming book on the "fourth dimension of poetry" concerns itself with this phenomenon and its physical ramifications.
in the process of reading one is made “dangerously susceptible to words” that enter the ear and penetrate the mind; they can become lodged there irremediably. The reader feels this vulnerability as an anticipatory dread of what s/he will hear next, a kind of “ear fear.” It is difficult to stop the flow of words into the ear as one continues reading, since no “earlid” exists in the way an eyelid does to protect the eye – except, it seems, through the comforting properties of words. Poetry’s allurements, especially the “repeated and compulsive forms of tonality” inherent in rhyme and rhythm (1982, 157) offer insulation for the ear.

Poetry’s beauty, expressed through its meter, assonance, alliteration, inflection, and cadence, are part of the “smoke” that provides the protective clutter for our ears that Woolf refers to in her “Prayer to the Nightbird” (PH 34), giving us a furry “earlid” and making it possible to ignore painful realities. Tennyson’s poem, “The Beggar Maid,” offers a concise example of how this poetic effect works. Its bouncy rhythm and relentless rhyme distract the reader from the difficulties of the situation which the young woman of the poem’s title encounters. However, Cameron’s photographic illustration strips away some of this padding and looks unflinchingly at the reality of the cruel and distressing aspects of the poem.

The image of “The Beggar Maid” (fig. 48) demonstrates Cameron’s technique of shooting a scene as if through the eyes of a character in the poem. “The Beggar Maid” has nothing to do with the Idylls; it is an extra poem that Cameron chose to include in the second volume of the Illustrations, and this choice bespeaks the possibility of a deeper motivation. Supposedly of ancient African origin, the poem, which is associated with

---

216 In A Critic’s Journey 1999, 245 and/or Saving the Text 1982, 143. Hartman refers to the ear’s vulnerability as part of “the cycle of words and wounds” (1999, 248).

217 Cameron had made an illustration for “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid” in 1867 (Cox 2003, p.478, fig. 1187) that is radically different from the one she used in the Illustrations. In the earlier image the man and woman’s bodies are contiguous, their clothing touching. The photo emanates a suggestive sensuousness absent in the 1875 version, though there is no joy or pleasure in their expression. In the earlier version the camera is closer, their figures are not completely captured, and their heads are facing the camera, making the couple joined in body but avoiding each other’s gaze.
obscure medieval origins, was recuperated from obscurity in 1765 by Bishop Percy and published in his *Reliques*. Tennyson became familiar with Percy's version and wrote his own in 1833. The poem, a Cinderella story of a King raising a young woman up from miserable poverty to become his queen, became very popular in the nineteenth century. Victorians saw King Cophetua as a generous and good man, wise enough to see true inner worth of the Beggar Maid through her rags and dirt. Edward Burne-Jones painted the scene with his wife Georgiana as a model (fig. 87), to tell her that he, like King Cophetua, could see through external superficialities to true goodness, and knew “the lack of importance of worldly reward in comparison to their affection” (Wilton 145).

Cameron could not have been influenced by Burne-Jones’ elaborate imagining of the King and the scantily clad Beggar Maid, as it was painted several years after she made her photographic version of the scene, but she was well acquainted with the Laureate's general objections to illustrations of his work, and his disappointment with the Moxon version of his poems, first published in 1857. Tennyson had written to Millais in November of 1854, advising the artist to avoid poetic license in providing a background of distracting details in his illustrations: “[…]it is the human beings that ought to have the real interest for us in a dramatic subject picture” (*Mem*, II:381). Cameron’s stripped-down version of “The Beggar Maid” technically satisfies Tennyson’s criteria better than the Burne-Jones painting: in her photo the two figures are featured centrally, with little else visible to distract the viewer from what is going on between them. The photo is successful as a literal enactment of the poem.

---

218 Martin Meisel’s discussion of Hunt’s illustration is an elegant explication of the poem as it appears in paintings (*Realizations* 34-37). Holman Hunt’s illustration of “The Beggar Maid” for Tennyson’s Moxon edition of *Poems*, published in 1857, and engraved by the Dalziels, can be seen at: [http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/whh/7.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/whh/7.html)
Tennyson’s poem makes a good subject for illustration, since the action of the poem takes place in the fullness of one moment, and, as is case with many of the Laureate’s visual poems, is consolidated in one clear image: the highly-charged moment in which King Cophetua first sees the Beggar Maid, falls instantly in love with her, and vows to make her his queen. Cameron’s enactment of this pivotal moment is an erotic failure. It does not have the sexual energy necessary to convince the viewer that there is any attraction between the King and the Beggar Maid. The two actors are not well matched, which makes it difficult to imagine them as a couple. He looks more menacing than enraptured, looming large on the left side of the frame. Sharp lighting and clear focus signal the photograph’s bald portrayal of the harsh sexual politics underlying what seems at first to be the story of a gallant act. The velvet curtain, which has been spread apart and held back, echoes the vulnerable position of the young woman.

Cameron eschewed her hallmark soft focus in this photograph and made every detail crisply visible. The sharply contrasting areas of white in front of the black background allow no spaces of soft gray in which the eye can rest and find comfort. The light streams down from above, as from a spotlight placed at high noon, illuminating the figures that stand like two pillars at opposite sides of the frame. The physical space between the King and the Beggar Maid is a metaphor for the social, psychological, and emotional space that separates them. The downward-flooding light pools on the floor, illuminating the king’s foot as he literally steps down (described in the fifth line of the poem), and the stain into which he is about to place his toe, a metaphor not mentioned in the poem.

---

219 A striking contrast to Cameron’s prim portrayal is Lewis Carroll’s highly eroticized portrait of Alice Liddell as a beggar maid: [http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/190036283](http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/190036283)

220 Cameron possessed shades that she could have used to cover various portions of the glass in her studio, thus controlling the source and intensity of the natural light.
King Cophetua moves downward in the poem to the lowest level of society, the members of which are poor and dependent beggars who have no name. The Beggar Maid is identified in the poem only by common nouns denoting her occupation and degree of purity, and by her appearance. In this picture, that appearance has everything to do with her clothing and the way it both covers and exposes her, which may seem demure to us but was exceptional in 1875. Cameron hiked up the Beggar Maid’s skirt at an angle, revealing the lace ruffles of her pantaloons beneath five diagonal rows of skirt ruffles. Tucking the skirt fabric up at the waist caused it to bell outwards, giving the actor’s abdomen a swollen, bulky look, and emphasizing the stains applied theatrically to her otherwise immaculate dress. It also caused her skirt to sway off balance over her legs, which makes her body appear slightly askew. Her forearms are bare, as are her lower legs – she wears no stockings or shoes.

According to Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in Western culture, women’s legs were always to be covered, “no expanse of leg was ever normally exposed, a protocol as applicable to women agricultural laborers as to aristocrats and bourgeoises” (87). Erotic significance was accorded to exposed legs from the eighteenth century on. The Beggar Maid’s legs are swathed in shadow and demurely arranged in a ballet dancer’s classical position, but they are clearly nude. Woolf mocks this taboo by having Cameron comment, “Legs, thank God, can be covered” in the 1926 edition of *Freshwater*. Ellen Terry is legless in all of G.F. Watts’s paintings, emphasizing that The Beggar Maid’s bare legs in Cameron’s photograph are a Victorian anomaly.

The exposure of a woman’s bare arms and legs, coupled with loosened hair, signaled similarly loosened morals. At the frequent gatherings her sister Sara Prinsep held for artists and writers at Little Holland House in Kensington, women’s clothing and hair flowed more
freely than it did in the less bohemian social circles of England. Even so, limbs were demurely and carefully covered at these occasions. Cameron and her sisters shunned the constraints of the crinoline in favor of the drama and ease of flowing gowns and Indian shawls. Anne Thackeray Ritchie observes that “[t]o see one of this sisterhood float into a room with sweeping robes and falling folds was almost an event in itself” (Hamilton 21).

The curves of the Beggar Maid’s costume contrast starkly with the perpendicular line of the King’s body, broken by diagonals at five levels: his collar, arm and hand, the hem of his cloak, fold of his knickers, and his shoe. All of these slanted lines point toward the Beggar Maid, making him seem sharply poised to advance on her. The diagonals of his figure, if extrapolated, would meet with the diagonal of her skirt, recapitulating the V of her arms and upside down V of her feet. The overall composition of the image forms an open diamond, which emphasizes the figures’ disconnection and repeatedly rhyming sharp angles, in contrast to the deep, connected V made by the figures in “Merlin and Vivien,” or the encircled figures in the roundness of “The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere.” The King is fully clad, from crown to tasseled shoe—all that is visible of his flesh is his hand, face, and neck. His cloak is pulled back to reveal that it is lined with fur, which reinforces the impression that he approaches her as a predatory hunter.

The Beggar Maid’s gaze does not meet ours; nor does she look at the King. She dissociates herself from him and us by looking offstage diagonally between his gaze and ours. Her discomfort is apparent; she covers herself protectively, as if aware that she is the focal point of the photograph. The King stares down at her. We, through the camera’s eye,

221 As discussed earlier in the first chapter of this project, it seems that Lady Charlotte Guest was aware of the hint of scandal attendant upon the salon’s artistic climate and so avoided gatherings at Little Holland House for the sake of her marriageable daughters. When Katherine and Julia went there without telling her, mother and daughters stopped talking to each other for a time and Lady Charlotte wrote in her journal “I know there cannot be a worse place to go alone than LHH, amidst artists and musicians— and all the flattery and nonsense which is rife in that (otherwise) most agreeable society.” (Guest 202)
assume the vantage point of the only characters not shown in the photo, the lords mentioned in the seventh line as transcribed by Cameron:

Her arms across her breast she laid;  
She was more fair than words can say:  
Bare-footed came the beggar maid  
Before the King Cophetua.  
In robe and crown the king stept down,  
To meet and greet her on her way;  
"it is no wonder," said the lords,  
"She is more beautiful than day."

As shines the moon in clouded skies,  
She in her poor attire was seen:  
One praised her ancles, one her eyes,  
One her dark hair and lovesome mien.  
So sweet a face, such angel grace,  
In all that land had never been:  
Cophetua sware a royal oath:  
"This beggar maid shall be my queen!"

In gazing at the photo, we are put in the position of onlookers expected to comment approvingly on the Maid’s appearance, encouraging the king to go on with his plans to intercept her. As the lords, we are caught and in the dissonance between what we say and what we see and understand of the scene before us. The lords scrutinize the Beggar Maid, commenting appreciatively on her ankles, eyes, hair, mien, face, and “angel grace” (Ricks 1:605, ll.11-13), studying every detail of her appearance. Tennyson strengthened the Maid’s erotic appeal by changing the word “winsome,” which he had used in the original manuscript draft of the poem, into “lovesome” (l.12), with its responsive, amorous connotations, meaning “affectionate” as well as “lovely.” We are complicit in a voyeuristic situation of unequal power and exploitation.

While the photograph may make us feel uncomfortable, the jingling verse tempts us to take the poem lightly. Written in bouncy iambic tetrameter and chiming with internal rhymes (“In robe and crown the king stept down/ To meet and greet her on her way”), it
evokes the reassuring sounds of a nursery song. Yet, its basic plot concerns the acquisition of a woman by a powerful man whom she cannot refuse, a man who is attracted to her because of the external charms of her appearance and demeanor, as she stands silently before him in the posture usually assigned to the Virgin Mary in paintings of the annunciation.  

In the persona of the lords in “The Beggar Maid,” we unconsciously respond and feel somewhat like a Victorian version of the elders spying on Susannah in the Book of Daniel (Ch. 13), admiring her beauty, attracted to her, urging the king on to cross the boundary of restraint and morality and go up to her. But unlike the full-bodied, fleshy scenes of Susannah and the Elders earlier painted by artists like Artemisia Gentileschi, or the voluptuous but shocking imagery of Wallace Stevens’ modernist poem “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” which revolves around the same bible story, Cameron’s image is cold and spare. Cameron takes away the compelling motivation for the King’s attraction to the Beggar Maid by choosing a model quite ordinary and demure in appearance. Having thus been made to question our own expectations as viewers, and having had our jolly aural enthusiasm frozen out of us by the sharp angles and stark contrasts of the photo’s sober composition as well as the dissociated gaze of the trapped young woman, we either have to reconsider what we think and feel or discount the photograph, which is what most critics have done.

---

222 In her unpublished doctoral dissertation, Victoria Olsen sees this photo as paradigm for Victorian gender relations and the commodification of women and also as a figure for the British colonization of helpless countries.

223 Mary Garrard, in Artemesia Gentileschi Around 1622: the Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity (77-113) exfoliates the importance of this painting in the development of the artist’s life and work.
Woolf Opens the Earlid: 

Violence in Between the Acts

Violence appears in a variety of forms in Between the Acts. In the two most horrifyingly violent subjects referred to in the novel, the war on the Continent and rape in London, the violence is factual and historical, based on occurrences that exist beyond the narrative of the novel and experienced at a remove by Woolf and her characters. Both the war and rape are connected by Woolf to domestic violence that is experienced by the women in the novel.

The reader is only peripherally aware that there is a war going on during the June day on which Between the Acts takes place. Giles silently observes that Europe is “bristling with guns, poised with planes” able to attack at any moment and “rake [their] land into furrows” (BTA 53). Buried next to the news that M. Daladier, minister of war, had pegged the franc (BTA 13, 216), the morning newspaper describes a violent rape at Whitehall (BTA 20), the memory of which returns over again as an undercurrent to the day’s activities at Pointz Hall, suggesting the more ominous realities lurking beneath the surface of life on this quiet summer day. Woolf famously suggested that individual, accepted instances of violence begotten by social inequalities issue in larger incidents like war because the gendered oppression and massive structural inequalities prevalent in society are not contained, isolated incidences, but spread from local to general in scope. If we could eliminate the exploitation and aggression taking place on an interpersonal level, Woolf felt, all of society would become more equitable and peaceful.

---

224 In the Virginia Woolf Miscellany vol.34, Spring 1990 (3-4), Stuart N. Clarke discusses the article that appeared in the Times on June 28, 1938, reporting the rape of a 14-year old young woman and the pregnancy and abortion that resulted in a physician’s trial, which inspired this incident of brutality in the novel.

225 The concept was condensed famously into a slogan in the title of an essay given in 1969 by Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political”. It is available at: http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html
The most vividly immediate example of violence in the novel occurs when Giles Oliver, the knightly son and heir of the book, feeling out of sorts at the constraints and requirements of his life, particularly his enforced attendance at the play, notices as he wanders the grounds between the acts that

There, couched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round – a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. (BTA 99)

As this ugly incident occurs in *Between the Acts*, Giles is about to consummate his adulterous attraction to Mrs. Manresa, a “wild child of nature” (BTA 41, 44, 50, 102), who willingly celebrates “the jolly human heart” (BTA 142,176), and sees the blood on his sneakers only as evidence of Giles’ being a naughty boy.

Woolf traces the growth of violence to its roots in female as well as male behavior: the adulterous Mrs. Manresa – with her red nails and lips – has costumed herself deliberately to be attractive to men, “what else is that really adorable straw hat for?” (BTA 39). Thus she perpetuates social conventions and participates in a system that oppresses other women. In Woolf’s mind Manresa is associated with the women on a London street described in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (CE 4: 173-7), who, “with crimson lips and

---

226 This is actually the third instance of violence in the novel that Woolf imported from her life: she and Leonard had seen a similar snake and toad détente on September 4, 1938, though they had not interfered like Giles does at Pointz Hall (D 4: 338).
crimson fingernails” are both enslaved and desire to enslave others. Thus, she concludes, we are all responsible for war: men through violent behavior and women by being willing participants in the patriarchal organization of society. The way to start eliminating war, Woolf believes, is for us to engage in “mental fight,” thinking against the current, not with it (CE 4: 174). The voice speaking through the loudspeaker at the pageant in Between the Acts points out to the audience that "gun slayers, bomb droppers" do openly what “Mrs. E’s lipstick and blood red nails” do slyly (BTA 187). We must all recognize and assume responsibility for our behavior.

By casting Giles’ wife Isa in the role of the injured spouse and designating Mrs. Manresa as the adulteress, Woolf invokes and then reverses the double standard applied to Guinevere in the Idylls and Alice in “The May Queen,” spreading the responsibility for the “fallen” woman, violence, and the fall of Camelot to the way society is structured.

Isa harbors desires for Rupert Haines, “the man in gray,” but knows she will never act on them, which intensifies her feeling of being “abortive” as a person (BTA 15). Woolf exposes the binary oppositions of the entrenched social order, and, by expanding its categories, and blurring polarities, attempts to initiate change through new perspectives. She introduces homosexual desire, gender ambiguity, and reveals our general complicity in the causes of oppression. Cameron’s conception of Guinevere’s adulterous relationship with Lancelot is crystallized in the Illustrations’ most tender and loving photograph (fig. 22). Tennyson conceived of Lancelot’s appearance differently, imagining his face “well worn with human passion,” according to an anecdote reported by Wilfred Ward.

---

227 I owe this insight to Mark Hussey’s discussion of “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (1997, 284).

228 At a gathering at his home in the winter of 1874 for Bishop Vaughan, a visiting Roman Catholic prelate, Wilfred Ward observed Cameron and Tennyson, and recorded the following anecdote:

Mrs. Cameron was at that time photographing various persons, to represent the characters in the ‘Idylls,’ and I had heard her grumble at not being satisfied with her attempts at a representation of Lancelot – face, figure, age, or expression, was wrong in every candidate. As Mrs. Cameron and
In the oral tradition of storytelling, as Woolf suggests, narrative was altered through frequent repetitions by the minstrel or troubadour. Stories were alive, in the sense that they grew and changed over time. After publishing the two volumes of the *Illustrations*, in May of 1875 Cameron composed and published a “Miniature Edition” of the photographs, to which she gave the title, *Illustrations by Julia Margaret Cameron of Alfred Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems* – putting her own name into the title ahead of Tennyson’s.

There are three new images in this edition: one portrays Guinevere, another is a close up of two little girls, and the third features “The Gardener’s Daughter” (figs. 60, 58 & 62). Guinevere stars in a photo (fig. 60) by herself, without Lancelot or the Little Novice, as she is shown in the original *Illustrations* (figs. 22 & 36). Cameron posed the Queen in stately profile for this final photo, wearing a crown and robed in rich velvet. In her two other appearances in the *Illustrations*, Guinevere does not appear as queenly as in this image. The outline of a throne appears on the left behind her, as if she were slowly separating herself from her royal station, her arms folded in front of her, hands hidden in the voluminous sleeves of her robe. She walks pensively, with dignity and grace.

---

Tennyson entered the drawing room together, Bishop Vaughan was standing in the glow of the wintry fire, looking, as he ever did, the most knightly of priests, and Mrs. Cameron stood for a moment transfixed [...] Then she cried out, pointing to him, ‘Alfred, I have found Sir Lancelot!’ Tennyson’s bad sight prevented him from seeing at whom she was pointing, and he replied in loud and deep tones ‘I want a face that is well worn with human passion.’ The Bishop smiled and blushed, and the general laughter could not be suppressed.

Variations on the Theme of Sisterhood:

“The Childhood of Alice and Effie”

The most remarkable of the three additional images in the “Miniature Edition” is the untitled photo of two little girls, dubbed by Helmut Gernsheim “The Childhood of Alice and Effie” (fig. 58). If Gernsheim is correct, Cameron took poetic liberty with this image, illustrating a scene that does not exist in Tennyson’s poetry by adding a “prequel” to “The May Queen.” This photo strikes the viewer as radically different from the other illustrations. A close up of two little girls, it calls out to the viewer as possibly the most sensuous and appealing image of the Illustrations. It is as if Cameron were remedying the lack of children in the Idylls and the Illustrations, not able to complete the project without adding an image from her own imagination.

In this image, two nude, sleepy-eyed little girls are shown embowered in roses and daisies. With its pronounced sensuality, this photo would be an apt illustration for Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market.” Their rounded bodies, partially covered by blossoms and flowing loose hair, their full pouting lips, half-closed eyes, and the way they lean together, one darker pudgy hand placed provocatively yet protectively on the other’s chest, make their infant sensuality palpable. The shaded background and soft focus add to the intimate sense of voluptuous disarray in the picture. The photo is of a different order from the rest of the illustrations – more lavishly sensuous and less narrative.

The critic Carol Mavor asserts that Cameron’s sensuous photos of nude children are illustrations of homoerotic, incestuous infant desire, “performances of sexuality.” Mavor

229 The photograph implies, as does Between the Acts, that there is “another play” at work behind the ones being performed (BTA 214)

230 See Mavor’s chapter on Cameron in Pleasures Taken.
is not unique in interpreting Cameron’s lusciously staged photos of children sexually; several critics have written on the subject, but the severely limited “infant sexuality” approach, does not yield an adequate reading of “Alice and Effie” in the Miniature Edition. As Victoria Olsen observes

> [...] the beauty that [Cameron] sought so eagerly and that she was praised for so insistently is so closely entangled with sexual desire that there is no way of stating definitively that she or her sitters or her viewers kept the two things in distinct categories of their minds, hearts, and bodies. Beauty itself is erotic. Bodies are sexual. The draped women and half-clad children, the unbound hair and close-up faces easily suggest sexuality, even if they stay within the realm of allusion.

(2003, 170)

No doubt Cameron was pleased with her photo of the two sleepy little girls and chose to include it because of its remarkable beauty.

Children do not appear in the *Idylls*; even the nestling child that Lancelot rescues and gives to Guinevere does not survive. Guinevere herself is barren, Elaine never weds but dies a “nestling” herself, and Vivien is not maternal. Tennyson suggests that Lynette and Enid will be mothers; both of their idylls end with the promise of children, though not with their appearance. “The Childhood of Alice and Effie” exhibits Cameron’s signature style and subject matter, harking back to a happier time of Cameron’s own life as a sister, mother, and ultimately, a grandmother. The photograph reinforces the theme of sisterly relationships in her life and resonates with the myth of Procne and Philomela, as well as with popular folk

---

231 James Kincaid leads the way with *Child Loving: the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. NY: Routledge, 1994. Several other critics, including Anne Higonnet (*Presumed Innocent*, 2008), have examined photography and children through the decades.

232 Tennyson elides the controversial issue of Modred’s birth issuing from the union of Vivien and Arthur, as it is told in the Lancelot-Grail Vulgate cycle. There is the suggestion that Enid and Geraint’s union will be fruitful, as Gareth and Lynette’s, which ends in an unconvincing scene of combat. It is difficult to consider their offspring to be characters in the *Idylls*. 
stories. The little girls – one dark, the other fair – conjure fairy tale sisters like Snow White and Rose Red.

Cameron may have included “The Childhood of Alice and Effie” as a sly or unconscious allusion to the suggestive nude photographs of little girls taken by Charles Dodgson. A close friend and visitor to Tennyson, Dodgson was not especially fond of Cameron or her photography; there was a silent competition between them. He disapproved of her softly-focused images, observing that “‘some are very picturesque -- some merely hideous’” (Gernsheim 1975, 29). In addition to competing with him for Tennyson’s attentions, Cameron also competed artistically: she disliked Dodgson’s seemingly obsessive choice to photograph little girls in scanty clothing, posed in suggestive attitudes. His sharply focused images with their sparse settings were the opposite of her soft, lush photographs. Dodgson’s portrait of Alice Liddell as a seductive beggar maid contrasts shockingly with Cameron’s image of her as a commanding and intense Pomona. The two were cordial to each other but never became friends. Until Cameron herself took up photography, Dodgson had treated her warmly; he took the flattering portrait of Cameron at her desk embracing her young sons (fig. 67).

Emily Peacock, the young woman who sat for “The May Queen,” was a frequent model for Cameron. She and her sister Mary appear together in the portrait Cameron called “Sisters” (fig. 88). The sensuous lushness displayed by the sisters of “The Childhood of Alice and Effie” (fig. 58) contrasts sharply with the decorously posed “Sisters.” Emily Peacock also modeled for “Ophelia” (fig. 86) in the spring of 1874, in the same dress in which she appears in “The End” (fig. 38) -- the last part of “The May Queen” triptych. Playing the similar roles as Alice and Ophelia, Peacock wears a distressed look, her long, Medusa-like fair hair falling

---

233 Both photographs can be seen at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Liddell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Liddell)

loosely tangled on her shoulders and around her face. In the semiotics of coiffure, not only do her serpentine locks index notions of loose morality or breakdown, they also intimate a sense of intense suffering and mental derangement, most obvious in “Ophelia.”

In *Between the Acts* there are non-biological sisterly pairs, such as Miss La Trobe and Lucy Swithin, the play’s director and ideal audience, who complement each other. Isa and Lucy constitute another pair of “sisters” in their motherhood and creativity. Isa hides her writing, believing that her words “weren’t worth writing in the book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected” (BTA 15). She uses the account book as a protective disguise for her poetry; Tennyson preferred to write his poems in a butcher’s account book. Lucy is granted the vision of the golden orfe after the play, along with a transcendent understanding of time: as everything exists simultaneously in consciousness, time does not exist. “We’ve only the present” (BTA 82) Lucy believes. Cameron’s *Illustrations* preserve and support Lucy’s realization: photography is, after all, the art of the eternal present.

The final chapter of this project begins with a discussion of Cameron’s arresting portrait of Princess Ida, using excerpts from Tennyson’s poetry to explicate the ways in which Ida embodies many of Woolf’s goals for women. It moves on from this most hopeful image to a discussion of the four photos that close the *Illustrations* – the group that portrays the deaths of Arthur and Elaine together with the image of Maud, a splendid tear welling up in her eye – suggesting that Cameron recognized art’s fragile illusion. They epitomize the process of farewell that Cameron and Woolf underwent at the end of their artistic careers.
Chapter Five

Dreams and Endings

In Volume Two of the *Illustrations*, Cameron introduces the third of her artist figures, after Vivien and Elaine: Tennyson’s medieval princess Ida (fig. 40), protagonist of his long poem *The Princess*. A study of the *Illustrations* in conjunction with Woolf’s writing would not be complete without a close look at *The Princess*, the photographic illustrations that Cameron made for it, and the ways Tennyson’s ideas resonate with those presented in *Three Guineas* and expressed in Woolf’s last novel. Of all Tennyson and Cameron’s women, Ida most closely embodies Woolf’s aspirations for her sex: the opportunity to be educated, control the pen, possess freedom to think independently, and ultimately find a place on which to stand from which to move the world. The poem is the point at which sentiments expressed by Tennyson and Cameron most closely harmonize with Woolf’s, especially Ida’s support for women’s education, her ambition to become “some mighty” writer – and thus influence the future, helping “after hands” to become “[w]hole in themselves and owed to none” (Ricks 2: 227 ll. 247-8, & 236 l.129). *The Princess* also contains an alternate vision of a woman’s life, embodied in the Prince’s mother, a woman Woolf would have characterized as the Angel in the House, and who evokes Cameron’s Enid as the good wife. Most significant for this project, the poem’s ending expresses a sense of melancholy defeat similar to that experienced by both Woolf and Cameron at the end of their careers, foretelling their final descent into silence. This chapter addresses the highs and lows of the *Illustrations* and
Between the Acts, starting with The Princess and ending with the completion of Woolf and Cameron’s life in England.

Alternative Roles for Women as Outsiders

All of the photos of the Illustrations, save the portraits of Tennyson and Arthur, show women in non-traditional roles: Vivien, Alice, Ida and Guinevere break conventional boundaries, defying normative expectations for women’s behavior, while Elaine, Maud, and Mariana, pioneer as solitary figures, women on their own. Even the obedient Enid shines for a while as a competent, clever, and spirited pioneer, as she manages to protect Geraint and silently navigate the challenges of a trip through harsh wilderness. There is no scarcity of traditional women’s roles to be found in the Laureate’s large poetic oeuvre. Cameron might have chosen to illustrate the lives of domestic female protagonists like Annie Lee of “Enoch Arden” or the eponymous “Dora,” for example. Through photography’s assumed indexical correlation with reality, the Illustrations’ images of unconventional women possess a persuasive, almost forensic, power to influence the viewer. They suggest historical truth by embodying the imagined characters in actual actors’ bodies, all the more convincing in 1875, for the newness of photographic technology. The photographs contain visual traces of the actors’ presence in the world – seemingly proof of their literary roles having existed.
“A Society” and Women as Citizens of the World

Woolf’s short story, “A Society,” functions as a weak parody of the Apostles, the long-established secret society of Cambridge students to which Tennyson and most of the men of Bloomsbury belonged, as well as the male students in the frame tale of “The Princess.” As discussed in the previous chapter, the “society” of the title is a group of six or seven young women who make themselves into “a society for asking questions” (SF 119) for the purpose of discovering what the world is like. As “outsiders” to the male hierarchy of power, the women vow to infiltrate various institutions, collect information, and come together periodically for five years to discuss their findings. Like the Illustrations, “A Society” acknowledges the limited roles available to women within a structured and paternalistic social order, but also suggests the advantages of being an outsider and seeing the world from the margins without having to make the investments required for occupying an integral position in a patriarchal society.

In Three Guineas, Woolf suggests adding a subcategory to modernist writing, made up of work done by members of an “outsider’s society.” Artists’ work that were covered by this rubric would augment the established, mainstream “early male modernism” of the preceding decades, which had been concerned with “experimental, audience challenging, and language-focused writing.” The women belonging to this subcategory of writers, like the plucky group described in “A Society,” though outsiders, would be considered artists, and not defined solely by their relational roles. However, their art originates within the intimate and personal aspects of human experience. Woolf “locates modernism’s origins squarely in the spaces of private life” (Rosner 4). Today’s “outsider art” begins to fulfill the

---

235 Scott, The Gender of Modernism, 4. Cameron, too, was an outsider to British society in many ways, among them her mixed-blood origins.
legacy of that dream, though it has been widened to become a category containing all noncanonical art, including the work of children or the disabled.

There are rewards as well as penalties inherent in marginalization. Woolf argues persuasively in her essay *Three Guineas* (108–9) that by disallowing women to have a voice and implicating them materially in preserving the status quo, society is robbed of a powerful force that capable of rebalancing it. Relegating women to the margins makes armed conflict more likely, since a woman's identity is legally conferred by a husband or father's citizenship, she is granted a fluid identity not allowed a man. Thus, if an Englishwoman marries a foreigner, she loses her claim to British nationality (TG n.12), but gains the opportunity to live as a global citizen, unhampered by national attachments, and therefore able to claim freedom from the “unreal loyalties” of patriotism or other forms of tribal identity. This freedom offers a woman the ability to speak out unhindered, as an advocate for “peace and freedom for the whole world” (TG 119, 122, 124, 172). As the speaker of *Three Guineas* famously observes:

[A]s a woman I have no country [...] As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world. (TG 166).

The epitome of outsiderhood, Anon is able to critique society even more acutely due to her perspective as playwright-observer, since theatrical literature is written and performed without the commentary of a narratorial voice and capable of expressing an enlarged number of points of view. Woolf considered women to be fortunate outsiders in this respect, occupying a neutral place from which to observe the pageant of life. From her vantage point it would seem possible for a woman to acquire a voice, a pen, to make art, be heard, and thus write history – as Tennyson’s Ida set out to do. Woolf believed that
literature, especially the theatre, offered a place for change, a "common ground" on which the foundations of peace, understanding, and equality could be built. This would happen, she believed, when “commoners and outsiders like ourselves make [literature] our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and write, how to preserve and how to create” (CE 2: 181).

**Border Cases**

Like the members of “A Society,” the Illustrations’ women exist at the edges of the acceptable feminine sphere. Cameron’s tableaux demonstrate photography’s prescriptive as well as its descriptive power. Mary Poovey designates such women “border cases” (12). They represent “problem” people who do not, each for her own reasons, conform to expected roles, and who therefore cannot be readily categorized, as we have seen, placed in either traditional female relational roles, or follow a predictable “feminine” script. These marginal women bring together the masculine public and the feminine private spheres, blurring, stretching, and bridging their boundaries. Cameron’s photographic essay shows Poovey’s border women embodied as actual people, adding new dimensions to their existence.²³⁶

Tennyson’s feminized Arthur has been described as “restrained, almost maidenly” (Gilbert 863), for his gentle, sensitive, and caring ways, reflecting some of the poet’s traits. More comfortable in his private life as an artist than in his public office as Laureate, Tennyson identified himself with the Lady of Shalott and Elaine, two reclusive artists of his

---
²³⁶ Katherine Marsh of the U of Rochester has written at length about Cameron’s Illustrations, pointing out women’s dominant roles in the images: [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/auth/cameron.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/auth/cameron.htm)
creation as mentioned in the previous chapter. Deemed by his contemporary Alfred Austin the “preeminent feminine poet of the age” (Christ 1987, 385), Tennyson was not androgynous in the “man-womanly” or “woman-manly” sense Woolf suggests in A Room of One’s Own (98).237 Many of his early poems have female protagonists: the 1830 edition of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical contains poems with titles like “Claribel,” “Lilian,” “Isabel,” “Mariana,” “Madeline,” “Sainted Juliet,” and “Adeline,” indicating his early ability to assume conventionally ascribed feminine characteristics in his writing. Scenes from the Idylls and other of his poems seem naturally to showcase women’s performance.

Since her efforts were confined to West Wight, and were set up as amateur technological and artistic experiments rather than as professional stage performances, Cameron managed to reify the dramatic scenes her actresses portrayed photographically without incurring censure for encouraging them in a career pursuit considered morally dangerous. She enlisted young women friends and neighbors to act in her tableaux, without any apparent objection from their families, even though acting was generally problematic for women of the nineteenth century, associated with unacceptable behavior, potentially rebellious and subversive. Renata Kobbetts Miller has persuasively argued that women’s appearance on stage prefigured the suffragist movement.238 Theatre historian Cary M. Mazer comments that there existed among Victorians

a genuine fear of a woman actually acting […] of the actress finding in her own soul the freedom of emotional expression of the character she plays; of the actress being corrupted by the moral impurity of the character, or, most

---

237 It is true that in The Princess Tennyson expresses sympathy for women’s plight, support for the movement to educate women and suggests a goal of androgyny (“Yet in the long years liker they must grow/ The man be more of woman, she of man”), but this is done within the context of a lighthearted frame tale and the wish for “a statelier Eden” not too different from the status quo except for the allowance of women’s education.

significantly, being corrupted by the very transgressive act of becoming someone else, of finding within herself other selves to become.

(unpublished paper qtd. in Auerbach 1990, 80).

Cameron was able to keep these fears at bay; in her self-confident enthusiasm she was probably unaware that she even risked evoking them.

Outsiders Excluded:

Tennyson’s Typology and its Implications

Tennyson’s use of biblical typology influenced his poetry, as is apparent in In Memoriam and the Idylls, in which Arthur Hallam and King Arthur are both seen as antitypes of Christ, each a step forward in mankind's progress toward becoming the ideal man. Victorian typology was conceived in masculine terms, the major path available to women featured Mary, a pure and obedient vessel, as the ideal type. Many Victorian men’s autobiographies are patterned using the template of biblical typology, with its traditional imagery and structural patterns. As discussed in the first chapter, in her Annals, Cameron presents herself both in the role of an individual creative artist and as the passive servant of her sitters. Like Anon, she does not claim to be a solitary genius, but the co-coordinator of a project created interactively with others.

If there had been such a thing as a female typology that featured a strong, independent leader who was the counterpart of Adam and Christ, Tennyson’s Princess Ida – seen from the vantage of the twenty-first century as she appears at the outset of The Princess, a woman of strength, goodness, and intelligent leadership – would qualify as an
antitype. Cameron’s portrait of Ida, captured at the height of her career as a leader, in an isolated moment of power, shows her in what could pass as the embodiment of Woolf’s conception of an educated and independent woman.

Tennyson’s poetry reflects his belief in the inherent complementarity – but not equality – of the genders, based on what Isobel Armstrong calls the nineteenth-century British “fixity of human values” (111), the indelibly opposite roles appropriate to each sex. Such constants enabled the Laureate to believe – with a certain amount of ineradicable Tennysonian doubt – in the existence of a permanent type and consequently in the possibility of an ideal consensual nationhood united through universal harmony of nationalist feeling. Writing as Laureate, he aimed to convey that ideal in his poetry.

Woolf was opposed to the idea of a nation composed of citizens identified with the motherland, acting in designated, immutable roles. Nationalism was problematic for her because of the tendency of national identities to cause conflict. Her vision of a desirable human society included flexible gender roles and a range of individual opinions and options available to each individual. Limiting women’s lives to complementary, scripted unions like Enid and Geraint’s, or the marriage of Ida to the Prince at the end of The Princess, were not a part of Woolf’s ideal cosmology. The relationship between Isa and Giles Oliver in Between the Acts is not an equal one: things did not progress much to make gender relations equitable in the century between publication of The Princess and Woolf’s last novel. The couple’s embrace at the end of Between the Acts may indicate the start new life, but it will spring out of violence, as Woolf observes that “first they must fight as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night” (BTA 219).

Typology has been applied as a template to Cameron’s photography by some of her early traditional critics, though it does not fit her work or help elucidate the ideas that power it. Neither Helmut Gernsheim nor Mike Weaver have seen performance in a
photographic tableaux as the possibly “transgressive act” of a woman “becoming someone else, of finding within herself other selves to become” as Cary Mazer has described the process (qtd. in Auerbach 1990, 80). They fit the photographs instead into an established system, as examples of “Christian typology, with references to the Old and New Testament,” providing Cameron with “a basic system within which to explore the Victorian consciousness” (Gernsheim 1974, 24). However, in plumbing the mysteries of the human heart through her images, “recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer” person (Annals 9), Cameron did not resort to externally imposed rubrics: her work is not easily fit into a program. Nor can she be accused of essentialism in her casting. She drew many interior “selves” out of her actors, exploring possibilities without resorting to typecasting her women, as we have seen in the case of Emily Peacock, who played the roles of the May Queen, the Angel in the House and the mad Ophelia in Cameron’s photographs.

Mary Hillier, her maid and frequent model, is an example of versatility. She appears in a variety of different roles, many of them maternal and spiritual, including the Madonna, angels, and other biblical subjects (fig. 89) shows her as St. Agnes in a rare image in which she seems almost to smile); but she also posed as Milton’s wife in “The Dream” (fig. 90), as Psyche, Sappho, and Clio, Juliet, one of the Elgin marbles, the Angel at the Tomb, the Lady of the Lake, and in an early portrait, Elaine (“Call, I follow” fig. 91). In the Illustrations Hillier is one of the three queens in “The Passing of Arthur” (figs. 59 & 81) and Maud (fig. 56) in the closing image of Volume Two. Through the broad diversity of roles in which she cast Hillier, Cameron discovered many of her previously buried, unacted parts but no essential, immutable typological self.

239 May Prinsep, Cameron’s niece, was similarly cast in more than thirty photos depicting a wide range of characters. However, Julia Jackson posed for Cameron more than fifty times, almost all portraying her own persona. She took thirty-two portraits of Henry Taylor, mostly as himself (Cox 2003, 4).
Virginia Woolf, clearly not an essentialist, also did not advocate a teleological concept of history. Her fiction critiques the notion of progress and subscribes neither to an ultimate blessing or catastrophe for humanity, leaving major issues open-ended. The unresolved nature of her last novel suggests an experience of life that consists of tide-like pulsations which in their ebb reveal an ugly reality like an old "boot on the shingle," covered up again in its flow (BTA 96 & 215). Using the tide as her metaphor for the constant pulse of human experience suggests the infinite number of points she believed were revealed by its constant movement. The spiraling repetition of the chivalric, polarized, hierarchically-organized myth cycle centered on a savior, like the one implied by the story of Arthur's continual return is incompatible with Woolf's world view.

The Princess

Cameron’s Ida: Ideal Womanhood Closed in Real Woman

Growing up with a familial exposure to the Illustrations, Woolf would have seen Cameron’s portrait of Ida many times. From her youth she had read and admired most of The Princess. Writing in her diary in her early twenties, she had acknowledged its influence on the women’s suffrage movement (PA 279). The poem, a clever piece of performance art, as Eve Sedgwick has pointed out, is constructed as the communal creation of a woman by seven young men. This male-controlled fantasy of a woman likely annoyed Woolf, but she may have been intrigued by its structure, with its concatenated theatrical aspects and composite construction, as well as its ideology. The poem also captured Cameron’s

imagination, as evidenced by the three illustrations she devoted to it (figs. 40, 42, & 44), which follow and counterbalance the three images of Alice, the fallen May Queen, as a sort of antidote to her punishment and a way of raising up the fallen woman by association.

Suddenly coming upon Cameron’s image of Ida, the hero of The Princess, whom we meet face to face in the middle of Volume Two, is like finding oneself standing before the icon of a powerful saint – the Prince expresses reverential feelings similar to these upon first seeing Ida. The posture, gaze, and dress of the Princess evoke traditional portraits of the scholarly St. Catherine of Alexandria, holding the book and pen that identify her. This hagiographic association would reinforce Cameron’s belief that her photographs were “almost the embodiment of a prayer” (Annals 12). Because of the arrangement of the actors and the imposing demeanor of the Princess at the forefront of her maidens, this photograph constitutes a visual “prow” for the book, causing the viewer to pause his progress through the images to study its commanding differences from the other photos. We see Ida here unburdened by the qualifying contextual frames with which Tennyson’s poem surrounds her.

The Princess confronts the camera directly, unlike the other women in the Illustrations. She and her colleagues are shown in full-length portrait view. No flowing locks are visible: their hair is covered, and they are holding books, the only books that appear in the Illustrations beside the one held by Tennyson in the frontispieces. Their serenely composed faces present a strong contrast to the distressed expressions of Alice, Mariana, the Beggar Maid, Guinevere, and Maud. Traces of excess developing solution have made ghostly demarcations around Ida’s head, giving her a halo. In addition to the silky robes, regally jeweled turban, and earrings she wears, the shaft of sparkly fabric descending in a column behind her intensifies the hagiographic effect to the portrait. Cameron used the same shimmering material to represent the “armor” worn by Sir Galahad, the purest knight
of Camelot (fig. 20). Its semitransparent qualities denote the excellence of his character, and when used as a backdrop for the Princess’ portrait, indicate the excellence of hers.

Tennyson experimented with poetic forms, extending his mastery to the ghazal, “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal,” suggesting that the story of Ida is set in ancient Persia, a faraway time and place which allowed the tale some leeway in plot. The women in the portrait are Cameron’s imaginative concoction of what Ida’s medieval colleagues would have looked like. Garbed in anachronistic costumes made of scraps from her household, they seem a blend of solemn caryatids and Puritan schoolgirls. Cameron cast an unidentified woman to play the role of Ida for this singular image, thus adding a mysterious and exotic aura to it. This is the only photo of the Illustrations in which the camera is placed at the level of the actors’ feet, not at eye level. Cameron’s choice to stage the scene inside Dimbola rather than in her glass house studio adds a sense of elevation and ascendant power to the atmosphere, derived in part from the fortress-slim windows and strong vertical lines that accentuate the women’s height. The cumulative effect of these details combined with Princess’ story and the excerpt of Tennyson’s verse that Cameron chose for the verso, make this photograph the central point in the second volume.

241 Their appearance evokes the women of Hawthorn’s “Young Goodman Brown” and other of the Twice-Told Tales.

242 Julian Cox identifies the two women on the left as “Miss Johnson” and “Miss Johnson” – the Princess is an unknown woman, and the woman on her right is Mary Hillier.

243 The photo was probably taken in the tall, crenellated section of Dimbola that Cameron had commissioned to connect the two separate dwellings. It is the only part of the house that has long, narrow medieval-style windows (see fig. 31, which shows Dimbola in a photograph taken while the Camerons lived there, in 1871).
Putting Her Foot Down

The pen and the book that Ida holds, combined with the Princess’ foot resting on the leopard in the dark foreground, and the foot which Cameron scratched into the negative, comprise the three most significant details or props in the picture, instances of Barthesian puncta (26). Paintings of women reading are not uncommon in nineteenth-century art, but images of women writing are very rare. The Princess holds the tools of her trade, a book and pen, which identify her as a scholar. Her firmly placed foot indicates her authority. On the cover of her book is an image so blurred by Cameron’s soft focus that it is difficult to determine precisely what it is, though it suggests a human figure – possibly the Princess herself, similarly holding a pen and book, on the cover of which would presumably be a smaller version of the photo itself, if we could see it, thus creating a mise en abîme that identifies the volume as Ida’s. The Princess’ book functions as a counterpart to Merlin’s book mentioned in Volume One, with its margins “scribbled, crost, and crammed with comment,” from which Vivian steals the spell of making. The book in Ida’s hands echoes and equilibrates the photographic one that appears in Tennyson’s hands in the frontispieces. As a stand-in for Cameron’s book of Illustrations, Ida’s emanates timelessness through the ever-receding image on its cover, thus linking the Illustrations to earliest history, almost as far back as Anon’s primeval poetry inspired by birdsong.

244 In October 1870, Cameron composed a sequence of photos of May Prinsep sitting at a table writing a letter, an opened book in her lap (Cox 2003, 253 fig. 435-8). These are the only Victorian images (photographed or painted) I have seen of a woman writing. Perhaps used metaphorically, Cameron placed a bird cage and a candle on the desk that holds May’s manuscript. She also scratched in words on the negative to represent the message May writes, making it clear that this is a woman who has things to say.
The Story of Tennyson’s *Princess*

Ida’s strength and power begin with her name. In Tennyson’s early poem “Oenone,” the eponymous nymph addresses her furious lament “O hear me, Mother Ida,” crying out to the sacred mountain named Ida, famed in classical mythology (R.Bell 1991, 255) for revenge against Paris for leaving her for Helen of Troy. Mount Ida is the highest summit on the island of Crete, and the name of the ancient mythological mother who was powerful enough to exact primitive justice for the wounded Oenone.245 Tennyson’s Ida is ultimately not as powerful.

The full title of the poem, *The Princess; A Medley*, indicates the innovative genre of its patchwork composition. It was the first long poem the Laureate published and the only poem he categorized as a medley. The *Prologue* and *Conclusion* form a frame tale which provides the setting for the body of the poem, comprising more than a hundred pages divided into seven sections, each one “spoken” by one of the young men.

The construction of the story that becomes *The Princess* takes place during a picnic on the grounds of an ancient country estate belonging to the nobleman, Sir Walter Vivian, located in rural nineteenth-century England. The local Mechanics’ Institute has set up some displays, all scientific in nature, reflecting the educational interests of the Institute and anticipating the heavy emphasis on science in the “masculine” university curriculum that Ida will put together for her female students. Though he was deeply interested in science throughout his adult life and managed to study it independently, science was not part of Tennyson’s education at Cambridge.246 In his conversazione group, the Apostles, he had

---

245 Cameron was aware of the myth: her 1870 profile portrait entitled “Oenone” is stunning.

246 Tennyson’s self-styled course of study reflects this interest in science (and German!): “Monday. History, German. / Tuesday. Chemistry, German. / Wednesday. Botany, German. / Thursday. Electricity, German. / Friday. Animal Physiology, German. / Saturday. Mechanics. / Sunday. Theology.” (Gold 450)
often played the game of telling a “Tale from mouth to mouth” (Memoir I: 253), making up a story in a circle of friends, each inventing a part, similar to the afternoon’s entertainment in which Princess Ida is created.

The idea of a university education for women, an anomaly in Victorian and Edwardian times had captured Tennyson’s sympathy. Though he seems to admire Ida’s scholarly aspirations in The Princess, nevertheless he sets the story up as a satire and, aware of the humorous possibilities of Ida’s aspirations, makes Ida’s story comic though it infuriates Lilia by trivializing her desires.

So compelling was the subject as a comedy, in fact, that W.S. Gilbert wrote and produced a play twenty-three years later, in 1870, called The Princess. It was staged as a pun-filled, “respectful per-version” of the poem, consisting of a blank verse parody in two acts, filled with burlesques of Ida’s university and Tennyson’s songs. In 1884 Gilbert collaborated with Sir Arthur Sullivan on the operetta Princess Ida, which turned Tennyson’s story into a farce. Even the chickens at Ida’s female university are all hens; no males are allowed on the premises. The lyrical music of Princess Ida, however, betrays a delicate and deep sympathy with Ida’s inner conflict.247 Interestingly, neither the play nor the operetta is presented within the explanatory frame tale in which the Laureate had set it, thus they both allow the audience to meet Ida as an authentic character, not a fabricated composite constructed by seven adolescent men.

The Princess was first published on Christmas day in 1847. Its six intercalated songs were not added until the third edition, published in 1850. Cameron illustrates two of these songs (figs. 42 & 44). A third one, the lushly romantic “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal,” as

---

247 I am thinking specifically of songs such as Ida’s touching solo “Minerva! Minerva! O hear me!” (#12, of the 1932 HMV/D’Oyly Carte recording, Gem 0144, Germany). Princess Ida was the first operetta Sir Arthur Sullivan wrote after having been knighted. That it contains some of his best work is not surprising, considering Sullivan’s fondness for writing musical accompaniment to Tennyson’s verse (see p.90). The solo evokes Val Williams’ 1920’s modernist portrait of Minerva wearing a pith helmet: a legacy of Cameron’s literary illustrations.
mentioned previously, was written in the form of a Persian ghazal, describes blossoms sliding into a porphyry font as a metaphor for lovemaking. It was later satirized by modernist poet Ezra Pound in his poem “Bath-tub,” which he dedicated to “lovers of the Tennysonian sort.”

In the fourth edition of the poem, published in 1851, Tennyson handicapped the Prince by afflicting him with seizures that cause him to live in a world of shadows – precluding his having any confidence in his own vision. This is significant, since we see Cameron’s portrait of Ida through the Prince’s eyes while he suffers a trancelike seizure on first encountering her (fig. 40).

The intercalated songs in The Princess were intended, as Hallam Tennyson explains, to emphasize the child as “the link through the parts.” Both of the emendations – the songs and the Prince’s trances – underscore the sexual politics inherent in the narrative arc of the poem, in which Ida’s ultimate choice is to become a domestic angel, which effectively returns her to the role of protected child. At the same time, the Prince’s weakness and the wounds he later receives make him appear vulnerable and stimulate her nurturing feelings. Thus she devolves from an independent woman into a maternal child. Tennyson’s “happy” ending to the poem leaves many important issues unresolved. Cameron chose to portray only the one narrative scene from the poem, rather than presenting the fuller picture of Tennyson’s Ida ultimately relinquishing her dreams of education for marriage and

---

248 As a bath-tub lined with white porcelain,
When the hot water gives out or goes tepid,
So is the slow cooling of our chivalrous passion,
Oh my much-praised, but not-altogether-satisfactory lady.
(Personae 101)

249 The Princess is the only poem by Tennyson, besides Maud, that Cameron illustrated in which the female protagonist has a forename and the male lead is only known generically – in this case as “the Prince.” In Princess Ida he is given the name “Prince Hilarion” by Gilbert and Sullivan.
motherhood. Her portrait restricts and celebrates our view of Ida to the height of her creativity, leadership, and intellectual ambitions.

Though *The Princess* went into several editions, it was not as well received as the Laureate’s other long poems. Tennyson was embarrassed at having written it soon after its publication. Nor did Cameron’s photographic illustrations of *The Princess* receive much recognition from her public.

**Tennyson’s Ida: “grand, epic, homicidal”**

The frame tale of the *Prologue* opens with a chronicle of the exploits undertaken by a brave female warrior of antiquity described as “half-legend, half-historic” (Ricks 2: 189, *Prologue*, l. 30), whose deeds are represented in sculpture at Sir Walter’s estate. The young narrator becomes fascinated by this “miracle of noble womanhood” – the story of a young noblewoman who becomes an inspiration for the creation of Ida by the students (Ricks 2: 190, *Prologue*, l. 48).250

The young men at the picnic unwittingly provoke Sir Walter's daughter Lilia by complaining about their instructors at university. She stamps her foot in impotent rage, envious and annoyed that they do not prize their privileged education as she would, if she were given the opportunity. Amused by his daughter’s vexation, Sir Walter commands the seven of them to make up a story, to “‘take Lilia, then, for heroine…/ And make her some great Princess, six feet high, / Grand, epic, homicidal; and be you / The Prince to win her!’” (Ricks 2: 196, *Prologue* ll. 217-219). Thus begins the ”Medley” of the seven male students’

---

250 Tennyson's female protagonist is based on Froissart’s tale of the Countess of Mountfort, who, besieged, “led a sortie from the town, riding in armour on horseback, and set fire to the enemy's lodgings” (Ricks II: 189).
voices; the women sing “like linnets in the pauses of the wind” (Ricks 2: 196, Prologue 1. 238), between the cantos.

The undergraduates make up the story of Ida, an ancient heroic princess, who forswears the life that has been scripted for her, escaping to a castle in the woods where she and her friends found a women’s university, the premises forbidden to men. The prince, to whom she was betrothed in infancy, infiltrates her university with two friends, disguised as women students. They are discovered and flee, but wind up in a battle with Ida’s brother for the princess’s hand. They lose the fight, and in the process the Prince is wounded. While nursing him back to health, Ida falls in love with him and yields to his marriage proposal, abandoning her aspirations.

Cameron’s three illustrations of the poem come from one brief section of The Princess. The first photo is an image of a woman at the English picnic in the frame tale, singing “O Hark!”, an intercalated song sung between Canto III and Canto IV. The second photo occurs at the part of Canto III in which the Prince first sees Ida. The third shows the performance of “Tears, Idle Tears,” the song that an unnamed female colleague of Ida’s sings as entertainment on the geological field trip on which they have embarked. Significantly, the Prince soon provokes Ida’s wrath with his song “O Swallow” (Ricks 2: 235), a love song which reminds her and her cohort of the treachery of romantic lyrics. The swallow, important in Woolf and Cameron’s work, is rejected as an aide to the lover’s suit in this poem. 251

251 Another intercalated song, “Home they brought her warrior dead” (Ricks II: 267) is satirized by Woolf in La Trobe’s pageant as part of the background music.
Ida's Triptych

Ida is caught photographically at the apogee of her power, at the moment when she first meets and presents her university of women to the admiring Prince, whose heart beats “thick with passion and with awe” for her, and who feels the impulse to kneel before her (Ricks 2: 225, Canto 3: ll. 174, 176). At this moment her cause and her character are most sympathetic to the reader. She recapitulates Lynette’s action (fig. 6) in the first Idylls image of the Illustrations of closely studying her fiancé-to-be, also emulating the posture the photographer herself in closely scrutinizing the potential subject for a picture; but Ida does not bend and lean over the Prince. She maintains her regal bearing; he is the one who succumbs to weakness and falls into a trance before her.

Cameron elides the other scenes of Ida’s narrative arc. Instead, she includes two “multimedia” photographs of women performing intercalated songs and accompanying themselves on musical instruments.

These two photographs show an unidentified woman singing “A Splendor Falls” and May Prinsep performing in a photograph Cameron entitled “Tears from the depth of some divine despair,” a line from Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears,” images anomalous in the Illustrations. Though several photographs in the two volumes show women singing, all but these two are integral parts of the idyll in which they are embedded. The two singers are extraneous to the plot of The Princess, and do not move it along. These two intercalated images (figs. 42 & 44) combine the new medium of photography with the ancient art of the troubadour, presenting a virtual mixed media sound track to surround the experience of looking at Ida. The viewer of the photos enacts them subvocally, hearing the music of the poetry while looking at the performer.
Woolf calls up Tennyson’s “Tears, Idle Tears” in *Between the Acts* by allusion to its American counterpart. Its absence conjures the memory of the famous poem through association – by naming other, less famous tears. When the raindrops that fall during La Trobe’s pageant remind Isa of human weeping, she quotes Whitman’s “Tears” from *Leaves of Grass*, obliquely evoking the idle tears of his weeper.²⁵²

As she did in the *Idylls* photographs, Cameron dispenses with the frame tale in illustrating *The Princess*, thus skewing the viewer’s overall perception of the whole, and changing Tennyson’s ambivalently playful tone to a more serious one.²⁵³ By eliminating the seven students who tell the tale of the romance, the photographer preempts narrative control and presents Ida without mediation,²⁵⁴ thus the poet’s Ida is re-made photographically by Cameron, allowing her to be seen not through the interpretive filters of the seven men of Tennyson’s creation who compose her, but through Cameron’s vision, as a woman of flesh and blood, not an experiment constructed of words. Thus the photographic Princess critiques the poetic version of herself.

²⁵² Whitman’s poem ends with the three repetitions of the word Isa thinks about: “O then the unloosen’d ocean, / Of tears! tears! tears!” The pageant sinks below the horizon of the Olivers’ minds at the end of the book, as if its loss were to be mourned, recalling Tennyson’s poem once again.

In passing, Woolf quotes the title of another song from *The Princess*, “Sweet and Low” during the mirror scene of the pageant (BTA 185).

²⁵³ Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Princess Ida* also dispenses with Tennyson’s frame tale, but for the opposite effect of making the story more hilarious and absurd. Cameron selects a single scene and portrays it seriously.

²⁵⁴ The only vestige of the frame tale in the *Illustrations* is figure 19, the young woman at the picnic who sings “O hark!” – but she does not further the narrative with her song. It is Cameron’s invention portrayal of a female troubadour.
The *Illustrations*’ “new plot”

Ida is the heroine of a new plot, not a re-run of the titillating nineteenth-century traditional “death of a beautiful woman” plot created to beget emotion (BTA 90), or the conventional marriage plot, widely employed by “lady novelists.” Cameron created the *Illustrations* to be plotless, as if, like La Trobe, she were saying, “[d]on’t bother about the plot; the plot’s nothing” (BTA 91). In her essay “Notes on an Elizabethan Play” Woolf voices the opinion that the typical plot detracts from the audience’s experience of a play by its “incessant, improbable, almost unintelligible convolutions which presumably gratified the spirit of an excitable and unlettered public” (CE 4: 64). The plot often “distracts us from any more profound enjoyment than that of asking who is behind that door, who is behind that mask?” (CE 1: 77). It is as if Cameron were fulfilling Isa’s unvoiced opinion that “[…] it was time someone invented a new plot” (BTA 215) and had invented a new way of telling stories in the *Illustrations* by breaking the established conventions of plot, character, setting, and dénouement. Woolf suggests that in order to make a literary form her own, a woman writer “has to devise some entirely new combination of her resources, so highly developed for other purposes, so as to absorb the new into the old […]” – in other words she must disrupt the expected nature of things (AROO 89). Through the random and erratic placement of photographs in the *Illustrations*, Cameron successfully thwarts the viewer’s plot-making impulse, while also preserving and honoring Woolf’s “scene-making” faculty (MOB 142), which was the crux of her creativity.

---

255 Poe’s ideal subject for poetry, which Woolf extrapolates into a Tennysonian ideal when she has the poet remark in *Freshwater*: “There is something highly pleasing about the death of a young woman in the pride of life” (40).
Escaping the Tyranny of the Private House

“The possession of a castle of one’s own is, perhaps, the first keen joy of College life”

In Tennyson’s poem, Ida, an only child, is motherless, having been raised by her father after the death of her mother. This places her squarely in a man’s world. Her father and the Prince, to whom she was betrothed at birth, seem reasonably sympathetic and respectful of her needs and desires, but the Prince’s father, King Gama, urges his son to claim Ida by force. In his advice he reinforces a sexual politics in which it is the woman’s desire to be preyed upon and subdued by a strong man, a belief that reinforces the inscribed code of patriarchy to an extreme degree:

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it, and we ride them down […]
Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.
(Ricks 2: Canto 5:147-50, 437-41)

This is precisely the sort of gendered description that Woolf deplored, but which Cameron paid lip service to, assuming a conventional position and stating famously that “men [were] great through genius…women thro’ love” (Wolf 79). Cameron managed ultimately to be great through both her creative genius and her connections to others. One wonders at the

256 From an article by Lilian Faithfull, principal of King’s College, London, published in the College Magazine in 1900, shortly after Woolf matriculated there (discovered by Anna Snaith and Christine Kenyon Jones).

257 This popular quote of Cameron’s appears in several other sources besides Wolf, e.g. Lukitsch, Olsen, Gernsheim, Ford, as well as online at http://www.metmuseum.org/pubs/bulletins/1/pdf/3269078.pdf.bannere.pdf
outset of *The Princess* whether Ida will be able to do similarly, to pay lip service to patriarchal expectations while continuing, post-poem, to follow through with her colleagues on their abandoned independent educational plans. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf expresses strong opposition to the “education of the private house” that women have historically received, making them prisoners to, “its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity” (TG 39).

However, the penalty for rejecting a woman’s scripted role in *The Princess* is frightening. King Gama is violently determined to rid Ida of her aspirations: “we ourself / Will crush her pretty maiden fancies dead / In iron gauntlets” (Ricks 2: 199, ll.86-8), he proclaims, employing the vocabulary of the armored knight and hunter. To him Ida is a prize to be caught, prey to be subdued. To the Prince she is a nurturing mate to replace his lost mother. And to Tennyson a captivating and heroic young woman who learned to bow to the inevitable, to desire what she should, and give up plans that could disrupt the social order she was born into. Ida, emerging from her childlike dependence on her father after enjoying a brief period of independence, returns to dependence in becoming a childlike woman who will soon be a wife and bear children of her own.

Reading backward, the plot of *The Princess* seems unbalanced from today’s perspective: marriage and motherhood seem a contrived and unsatisfactory replacement for Ida’s dream of earning a university education. Giving up the dream that would enable her to make a contribution to the intellectual conversation of the larger world is a cruel sacrifice for Ida. Tennyson knows this. His student narrator concedes that “maybe [he] neither pleased [him]self nor” Lilia, Ida’s alter ego in the frame tale, and her cohort with the “strange diagonal” (Ricks 2: 294, *Conclusion*, l. 27) he wove between the men’s “mock-solemn” (Ricks 2: 195, *Prologue*, l. 210) and the women’s “true-heroic -- true-sublime” (Ricks 2: 294, *Conclusion*, l.20) versions of the Princess’ story. He evades all responsibility for
evaluating the merits of the male versus female plots, shifting the blame to the state of society, and expressing hope for equality in the future. The undergraduate moderator of the poem rationalizes the conventional ending of his narrative by observing that Ida’s aspirations may be unrealizable at that particular moment in history, since “This fine old world of ours is but a child/ Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time” (Ricks 2: 295, Conclusion, ll. 77-8).

**The Princess and Three Guineas**

In *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf addresses many of the issues of *The Princess*. As previously discussed, Woolf felt that it was necessary for the survival of civilized humanity to leave behind the outgrown code of chivalry and to replace it with a better social organization. The first step toward that end was, she believed, the education of women. Deprived of her university, Ida will go from her father’s to her husband’s home, caught in what Woolf described in *Three Guineas* as “the tyranny of the private house,” the shadow of which it was imperative for women to escape. With an education, the modern woman could become employable, Woolf believed, and once able to earn money, would escape the private house and influence the world through her writing. The more women’s voices were heard, the more likely it would be that peace and equality could be achieved. Chivalry, epitomized by King Arthur, had permeated British consciousness for generations, keeping old hierarchical structures in place and preventing the voice of women from being heard. In the century between the writing of Tennyson’s *Idylls* and Woolf’s late work, chivalry, in Edmund Burke’s premature estimation, had “gone.”
Another Arthur, the eponymous Arthur Pendennis, protagonist of Thackeray’s novel, appears in *Three Guineas* as the recipient of the AEF, or *Arthur’s Education Fund*. The fund had been saved up by his family for the purpose of paying for his education, resulted in keeping his sister, one of the “daughters of educated men” (TG 5, 18, 21, 22, 35, & etc.), from obtaining an education of her own. Worse still, Arthur proceeded to squander this precious money at university.

The lack of an education keeps a woman in a childlike state of dependence, Woolf observes. Ida’s father explains his daughter’s “misguided” goals to the Prince as her wrongheaded effort to be an adult: “Knowledge, so my daughter held, was all in all: they had but been, she thought/ As children; they must lose the child, assume/ The woman” (Ricks 2: 201, Canto 1, ll.134-7), striking out on their own away from father and husband. Lilia is described patronizingly by her father as “a rosebud set with little willful thorns,” and called a “petty Ogress” and “ungrateful Puss” mockingly by the men who compose her story (Ricks 2: 193, Canto 1, ll.153, 156).

“Great deeds cannot die”

In a key moment in the frame tale, Lilia wishes aloud to her father and the seven students, “Ah, were I something great! I wish I were/ Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then, / That love to keep us children!” (Ricks 2: 192, Canto 1, ll. 131-3). She longs to have the power that Tennyson possesses, which was so important to Woolf: the power to control the pen, enabling her to write a new version of history. Karin Westman observes insightfully that Woolf’s conception of ideally-written history is dialogic, including the voice of formerly silent parts of the population, modeled on the metaphor of audience
Presumably the “mighty poetess” whom Ida aspires to become could rewrite England's foundational epic from the point of view of all of humankind.

Disseminating one’s writing was crucial for women in Woolf’s opinion, offering an opportunity to speak one’s mind and have one’s voice heard. Through her writing a woman could bring issues important to her to the public’s attention and create something of lasting value that would survive her. Of course, it is Tennyson who puts similar feminist sentiments into Ida’s mouth. His writing publishes her aspirations to effect change through writing, since she does not have the voice to speak them herself. It is his words that last into the future. Tennyson ventriloquizes Ida’s explanation to the Prince why education, enabling her to do great things, would be more important to her than bearing children:

[...] Great deeds cannot die;
They with the sun and moon renew their light
For ever, blessing those that look on them.

(Ricks 2: 227, Canto 2, ll. 237-9)

Ida does not desire fame for herself, but to influence future generations of women to follow an independent course. The “great deeds” alluded to here could be the future works of literature capable of renewing the canon – and La Trobe’s pageant. Woolf saw the education of women as a way to open the field to formerly silent voices, illuminate future generations, and alter history.

---

258 “The Character in the House: Virginia Woolf in Dialogue with History’s Audience”
Heads of State and Standing on One's Own Feet

Ida is referred to by her colleagues as “the Head” – a synecdoche for her intellect and judgment as well as a reference to her position as head of her university. Another “head” had ascended the throne in England ten years before *The Princess* was published: Victoria became Queen at approximately Ida’s age. Margaret Homans (1998, 202-223), has written compellingly about Queen Victoria’s careful self-presentation, which emphasized her feminine role, submissiveness, and devotion to her husband. The Queen defined herself as mother to her subjects rather than as head of state. I would argue that Ida’s foot, placed so decisively on the leopard in the photograph, is at least of equal importance to her royally turbaned head.

“To plant a foot in the Time”

Lilia stamps her foot in righteous indignation in the frame tale of *The Princess*; the young men introduce the equivalent of that action into the story they concoct, translating Lilia’s stamping into Ida’s placing her foot firmly on the leopard. The foot, the outlines of which the photographer carefully scratched into the negative, functions as a metaphor for Ida’s determination to exercise control, as well as her regal power to do so. She rules over even the wildest and most powerful of jungle beasts. The gesture of putting one’s foot down, in addition to its usual meaning of setting boundaries or resisting a force, also refers metaphorically to Ida’s desire to find “the one POU STO whence after-hands/ May move the world, though she herself effect/ But little” (Ricks 2: 227, Canto 3, ll. 247-8). Archimedes is
famously reputed to have claimed that, given a pou sto, a place on which to stand, he could move the world with a lever. Ida places her foot on the leopard’s back as a temporary substitute for the pou sto of her dreams. That place of permanent foundation would have to be located outside the social order into which she was born, a place from which her accomplishments – however small -- could be magnified into a world-moving force through the leverage of succeeding generations.

Reasons to adopt the community playhouse as an organizational model for society became more compelling for Woolf as the war years progressed. By the time she wrote *Between the Acts*, beset by feelings of isolation and impotence, she had begun to give up hope of finding a place within the walls of her writing room – the eponymous room of one’s own – from which she could expedite the social changes that she believed in. Her reading of Elizabethan plays as background material for the survey of English literature, *Reading at Random*, on which she had embarked in 1940, inspired her. So had the process of writing her essay on Ellen Terry’s acting career and the serial story drafts of Henry Taylor playing King Arthur for a portrait in Cameron’s studio. Woolf conceptualized the actor as leaving “post cards” from the stage, images that resembled the tableaux in Cameron’s *Illustrations*, or the scenes in La Trobe’s pageant. She was motivated by the desire to reconnect with her audience and felt bereft by the loss of the “echo” from her public that she had come to rely upon, as a consequence of her wartime flight from London. The community playhouse emerged in her imagination as a place where people could gather to create, connect, and bulwark the future in the face of annihilation. As discussed in the previous chapter, in *Anon* Woolf urges the necessity of taking a stand to rebuild civilization through the figure of the playwright: “Only when we put two and two together, two pencil strokes, two written words, two bricks do we overcome dissolution and set up some stake against oblivion”
(Anon 403). Woolf and Cameron worked to set up these stakes, though Ida, a fictive creation, ultimately caved in to the pressures that surrounded her.

**Lapsing into Silence**

The fate of Ida’s university is sealed when the Princess’s resolve melts at the sight of the wounded Prince; she loses her will to struggle for herself and thus starts the process of being made over in the image of the Prince’s angelic mother, described in verse quoted earlier in Chapter Two, applied to Woolf’s mother, describing the Angel in the House:

“Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
Interpreter between the Gods and men.”

(Ricks 2: 291-2, Canto 7, ll. 299-303)259

Such a woman is to be worshipped on the pedestal of courtly love, a paradox through which she will be raised up higher than the man who reveres her, but remain under his complete control.

In a plea that reflects her inner conflict and self-awareness, Ida ultimately repudiates her formerly independent stance. She sheds it as a “dead self” that “nurse[d] a blind ideal like a girl” (Ricks 2: 226, Canto 3, l. 205), and becomes ready to soar – or fall –

---

259 Woolf copied this excerpt of *The Princess* into her reading notebook, one of the few times she inscribed Tennyson’s verse in her notes (Silver 1983).
into the realm of angelhood. In a wrenching plea she calls for help from the male contingent of her family

“Help, father, brother, help; speak to the king:

Thaw this male nature to some touch of that
Which kills me with myself, and drags me down
From my fixt height to mob me up with all
The soft and milky rabble of womankind”

(Ricks 2: 276, Canto 6, ll. 286-90)

This is the turning point in Tennyson's poem, the moment at which Ida resumes the path that has been mapped out for her at birth, renouncing her effort to free herself from ignorance and find a way to free others. Ida is a Woolfian woman at the apogee of her powers in the photograph, unwilling to compromise her ambitions, who, over the course of the next fifty pages of poetry, casts off her independent self to fulfill her biological and instinctual destiny.

Though he sets up a false conflict between Ida's scholarly aspirations and her nurturing responses, within this context, Tennyson attempts to portray her struggle in a sympathetic, even-handed way. She is pressured by her fellow female university colleagues, who feel the passage of time acutely. The roles they had discarded have returned to haunt them: “their May/ Was passing: what was learning unto them? / They wished to marry; they could rule a house; / Men hated learned women” (Ricks 2: 219, Canto 2, ll. 439-42). As Woolf's Angel similarly advised her when she tried to write, women's role is to be self-sacrificing and please men (Pargiters 60).
Ida’s descent from her position as feminist icon is as inevitable in Tennyson’s poem as the death of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One’s Own*. The time had not yet come for women to achieve independence, both stories say. Ida feels herself sinking; she knows she will soon be indistinguishable from all the others in the “milky rabble”, “pretty babes / To be dandled”, no longer in possession of “living wills and sphered / Whole in [them]selves and owed to none” (Ricks 2: 236, Canto 4, l. 128-9). Ida’s conflict is all the more painful for her acute self-awareness, fed through Tennyson’s words uttered by the seven undergraduates who created her. The injustice of the situation, expressed as exquisitely by Tennyson as it is by Woolf, causes righteous indignation to build on her part. But Ida herself has given in and no longer possesses the anger or long-range world view that Woolf’s anti-war speaker does, factors that motivate her launching a campaign for women’s education.

Taking on her scripted role silences Ida. She yields without a murmur to what the men have decreed for her (Ricks 2: Canto 4, ll. 368-378), entering an ominous silence which Herbert Tucker believes indicates the “opening of an inner, lyrical space of defeated melancholy” into which she retreats, lapsing into a “tearful inarticulateness that will be her chief means of expression” through the end of her tale (359). Ida’s aspirations to autonomy, agency, and the desire to change the world have ebbed away by the end of *The Princess*. Parallel to the way in which Arthur’s kingdom “reverts to the beast” at the end of the *Idylls*, Ida’s reverts to the child.

A sense of defeated melancholy also pervades the scenes of *Between the Acts* in which Isa muses on the violence inherent in life, thinking that she hears the young rape victim described in the morning newspaper crying out (BTA 20), and the cries of the city of London itself (BTA 154). She imagines her own death (BTA 104), and chafes painfully against being trapped in her difficult marriage. She stands helplessly by, watching while another woman seduces her husband (BTA 48), eventually likening herself to a beast of
burden, a donkey trekking onward, destined like Ida for a journey she did not choose: “That was the burden [...] laid on me in the cradle [...] what we must remember, what we would forget” (BTA 48). While writing Between the Acts Woolf herself was fighting feelings of despair and isolation which threatened to engulf her, though they were seeping into her life as an encroaching silence. Imagining the cast and audience of La Trobe’s pageant helped mitigate her loneliness, fostering the illusion of human presence and the sound of human voices performing the script as she wrote it.

**Essentialism and Women’s Identity**

Confused by the story of Ida, Lilia addresses her maiden aunt with what may be the most significant issue in the poem: “You -- tell us what we are” (Ricks 2:294, *Conclusion*). The aunt, “crammed with theories out of books” (Ricks 2: 294, *Conclusion*) cannot give a satisfactory answer. Like the male scholars she describes in *A Room of One’s Own* who wrote scores of books on the subject, the aunt is able to define the nature of woman intellectually but not give an answer that is grounded or insightful, “from life.” At the end of the frame tale of *The Princess*, Lilia’s question still remains unanswered – what is woman? Can she define herself or will she continue to be defined by others’ imaginations? Woolf implies in *Three Guineas* that a woman, given freedom and some support, is certainly able to construct her own identity, not in opposition to a pre-existing definition, but in an ongoing, open-ended way that allows for evolving individual uniqueness. She opposes the essentialism that insists on an unchanging core of being for each individual.

---

260 Cameron wrote this phrase at the bottom of almost all her photographs, emphasizing the miracle of photography’s ability to capture life.
Cameron's knowledge of woman's life and identity was experiential and intuitive as well as literary. Throughout her life, she constantly took on new roles; what she learned from experience enriched her artistic achievements. In addition to her photographic work, and her relationship to others, focusing on, listening to, and caring for them as daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend, and community member, she dabbled in letters. She wrote poetry, translated Burger's *Leonore*, and offered to handwrite Thackeray's novels for him. She maintained a studio in the Victoria and Albert. As a gracious hostess, she constantly invited guests, often total strangers, to dinner or to stay at Dimbola, sometimes because of their photogenic qualities, always intrigued by the interest and excitement of new ideas and points of view they represented.

Photography set her apart on her most singular journey, as she became more focused on her own fulfillment and success. Being convinced of the importance of her work added to the determination with which she pursued her evolving self-definition through artistic expression.

Though she labored much of the time on her own, exposing, developing, and printing photographs, Cameron is not a good model for the artist as a solitary genius, a hero struggling alone in her studio to produce great works from her imagination, sacrificing her life to art. She enthusiastically undertook grueling hours in the studio and darkroom in order to share the fruit of her labors with others. By the end of her career her work was composed almost completely as a community effort of which she was the coordinator.

Her skills and taste were seasoned and enriched by the colorful, complex, and inventive life she led. She had accrued wisdom managing the difficult, chancy, sometimes absurd negotiations between her photography and “the emotional/ manual/ managerial complex of skills and tasks” involved in running her career and household; (Le Guin 222).

She played many roles. In her work, Cameron was public relations manager, playwright, prop, costume, and lighting director, producer, designer, casting head, and stage manager all
in one – not a lonely Elaine embroidering in a tower, a queen doing penance in a convent, a passion flower with a splendid tear, or a Pale Nun in her cell. Her art became richer and more generative through contact with the gritty complexities of daily life among a network of friends, family and a community -- out of which sprang her own version of a community theatre.

**Valedictions**

Both Cameron and Woolf became aware that their careers were coming to an end when they were about to enter their sixties. With the book of illustrations and the novel, they had each completed a valedictory work exploring and celebrating Englishness, memorializing the way of life they had been born into, expressed through literature and performed by contemporaries. Both the *Illustrations* and *Between the Acts* are essentially meditations on loss and endings coming as they do at the end of their authors’ careers; both celebrate the present while enshrining the memory of the past.

**The Machinery of Mourning**

The mood and tenor of Cameron’s book falls precipitously after the high point of *The Princess* portrait. Immediately following the photographs of Ida and the singers come two images of women: a miserable Mariana and a commodified Beggar Maid, both in transitional

---

261 Cameron was fifty-nine in 1874, when the first volume of the *Illustrations* was finished; Woolf was the same age when she finished the third draft of *Between the Acts*.

262 Though she fears that English culture will be lost, Woolf suggests at the end of the novel that Isa is girding her loins for battle with Giles, just as England is preparing to fight, and shows La Trobe meditating on the possibilities for next summer’s production, implying a cyclical, hopeful shape to the novel. Similarly, Tennyson imagines the return of Arthur to England in the future though he knows the old order is giving place to the new.
states. They are followed by the four images that signify the final fading of the *Illustrations'* hopefulness and the ending of the dream.

The final part of Volume Two consists of a group of four photographs, constituting the last third of the volume. All four are representations of sadness and loss. Elaine floats to Camelot on a barge in fig. 50, manned by a “dumb old servitor,” with the yellow-throated nestling flying above her as an identifying pennant. She is brought into hall at Arthur’s court and placed on a bier in fig. 52, holding the letter written to announce her plight to the nobles – in case the sight of her body is an insufficient text, Cameron scratched words into the negative on the paper, emphasizing the importance of her writing. The wounded Arthur sails away from Camelot “like a shatter’d column,” guarded by the three queens in figs. 54 & 81. And finally, Maud, nearly disappearing among the passion flowers that identify and seem to claim her, grieves at the close of the volume.

We, the viewers, are placed in the position of mourning spectators in each scene. We stand with Elaine’s brothers and father on the shore while she floats past on her way to Arthur’s court. When she arrives at Camelot, we watch along with members of the court. As Arthur sails out to sea, we stand on the shore bidding him farewell by the side of loyal Sir Bedivere. In the very last photo of the book we occupy the position of Maud’s lover, the grief-stricken narrator of the poem, nearly driven to madness. We see the “splendid tear” gathering in her eye as she looks westward to the fading of the day.

Cameron would soon be looking westward toward West Wight after moving to live on a very different sort of island in the East, as she and Charles Hay left for Ceylon almost immediately after the second volume of the *Illustrations* was published. With these last photos, the curtain was falling on Cameron’s photographic career in England.
The more complicated the staging of Cameron’s photographs, the less likely we are to lose ourselves and become involved in the scene they present. This failure of viewer empathy due to artistic awkwardness lends a postmodern feeling to the tableaux vivants, as if the defamiliarization they achieve were purposive. In the Illustrations, the visibility of the studio walls and roof, the lines suspending Elaine’s shield cover, the wrinkled, makeshift costumes, and the earnestly scratched-in additions to the negatives – like Ida’s foot and the moon over Arthur’s boat – all call attention to the mechanisms of failed illusion. While they detract from the effect of the illustrations, these “flaws” are evidence of the photographer’s earnest presence and high ambitions. In her crowded photos, these homemade, patchwork qualities function as part of Cameron’s aesthetic signature, evidence of what she called her “master hand” (Annals 3).

The props, costumes and scenery in these last three images, with their damaged illusions, demonstrate the limited ability of elegy to offer solace in the face of grief. The awkward and overdone melodramatic images of Elaine and Arthur remind us that art ultimately fails to console, and that the failure of illusion can feel – as La Trobe asserts – like death (BTA 180) – the death of the ability to believe in illusion and the death of hope for future consolation from the imagination.

By revealing the apparatus of their construction and exposing the machinery of mourning, these photos elicit a complicated mixture of responses from the viewer. An image of the slain King and hero taken to Avalon by the three queens (figs.54 & 81) would be expected to have the capacity to elicit a melancholy response from the viewer, as a cadenza to the poetic Passing of Arthur. Instead, in Cameron’s kitschy rendition of the classic scene,
Arthur, the dignified once and future king, played by the porter of Yarmouth pier, lies in a cramped rowboat in a suit of rented chain mail looking at the camera beseechingly, caught in what seems an attempt to crawl overboard (fig. 81). The image first evokes a combination of horror, irritation, and amusement in its preposterous portrayal and then a sense of disappointment at the failure of the illusion. The viewer, however, understands that “a vision imparted” means “relief from agony … for one moment” (BTA 98), and appreciates that the photographer has invested herself wholeheartedly in a failed effort at solace.

The Pulse of Hope and Disappointment

The composition of the photographs changes from frame to frame through the two volumes, from the close ups of the portraits to the long shots of group scenes. This alternation sets up an irregular rhythm among them between intimacy and distance. The arrangements and compositions within the scenes also vary; some photos contain multiple figures in various combinations, while others feature a single character. The play of shadow and light and the outlines of forms in some of the images – which occur in the portraits of Maud and Arthur, for example – suggest that Cameron’s art, with its Pre-Raphaelite roots, anticipates the aesthetic school (Staley 135). Tennyson’s poetry is chopped into segments which, in the second volume, are arranged in random order, adding to the feeling of flux. In Between the Acts, Woolf refers to the audience members as dispersing and reuniting continually throughout the performance, forming a pulsing rhythm of contraction and

263 I chose this particular print of the farewell of Arthur, another version of the earlier photograph (fig. 54) because of its exaggerated qualities.
expansion that operates as a main theme in a novel in which nothing is ever static or stagnant, but all is left open-ended and fluid. Rhythms of speech, surges of emotion, and shocks of realization permeate the novel; noise and action alternate with silence and emptiness. There are radical visual perspective shifts from the view inside a flower to the depths of the vault of heaven, as if the reader were seeing the novel through an expanding and contracting pupil, or a constantly refocusing camera lens.

The erratic, variable quality of the pageant scenes is suggested by the Illustrations’ randomly organized photos. In Woolf’s novel the tone, affect, and pace shift constantly and unpredictably, back and forth in layers, from light to dark, comedy to tragedy, ancient times to the present, silence to multiple simultaneous conversations, and belief to doubt. Isa describes the two chief emotions that make up modern life as tides of “love” and “hate” (BTA 48, 66, 90, 215), finally adding a third, “peace” (BTA 92), thus breaking up the suggested polarity of human feeling. Waves of thought and feeling roll constantly back and forth across the text. At high tide the pageant is able to reach its audience, which is then unified, but when it ebbs, in its receding undertow the audience frets, comes apart into factions, resents being present, withdraws its attention, and “[t]he old boot appear[s] on the shingle” (BTA 215, 96). The waves swell and shrink unevenly; sometimes roiling about both ways as simultaneously as serial words on a page can:

“Did you feel,” [Lucy] asked, “what [Rev. Streatfield] said: we act different parts but are the same?”

“Yes,” Isa answered. “No,” she added. It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted. (BTA 215)
Lucy, the unifier, is balanced by her brother Bart, the separatist. Together they represent the two chief ontological stances toward the universe that philosopher Gregory Bateson describes as transcendent and immanent. Lucy takes a more complementary, trusting view of the universe, issuing in transcendent moments. Bart challenges life with his symmetrical, immanent approach to human experience. With his lifetime of colonial work in India, and a product of the public schools, Bart represents the chivalric Kiplingesque man leftover from Victorian times living in the twentieth century. In her erasure of categories and inclusive photographic images, Cameron appears to see life, or at least her art, in more complementary terms.

Much had changed in the sixty-six years between the publication of the Illustrations and Between the Acts. Newtonian physics as a way of understanding the laws of nature had been challenged and amended by relativity and quantum physics. What had been previously accepted as unchangeable absolutes were now seen to be mutable. Further, Freud’s hypotheses had uncovered uncharted territory in the human mind, opening up an unknowable region that controlled human behavior. Rather than integrated persons, whole and intact, Freud suggested that the human mind was a bundle of raw drives and unconscious forces. The Hogarth Press had published the complete standard edition of Freud’s work, with which Woolf was well acquainted, as reader and editor of the series. The influence of his work is reflected in the epistemology of the novel, especially his ideas about mourning, jokes, and The Future of an Illusion as it relates to theatre.

Complexly drawn, the characters in Between the Acts exemplify subtle nuances of human experience. As described above, Woolf neither saw the world in binary oppositions nor allowed polarities to remain as balanced pairs in her writing for long. The flux of

---

Woolf’s world view does not resemble the balance of pendant pairings that we see in Tennyson’s poetry – such as the contrasting “Lotos-Eaters” and “Ulysses” – but an erratic, unfinished and always-changing conception of life.

On a meta-level there have been a myriad of published responses to the novel itself over the years since its publication. Critics have expressed opinions representing almost every level of enthusiasm from high to low tide: appreciation, amusement, harsh criticism, and everything in between. Woolf’s own attitude toward *Between the Acts* varied. She wrote about it in her diary on November 18, 1940, commenting, “I’ve enjoyed writing almost every page” (D5: 340). However, during the following months she came to feel differently, suggesting to John Lehman that the Hogarth Press should not publish the manuscript of *Between the Acts* because it was worthless.

Woolf’s novel chronicles a twenty-four hour period. Tennyson plotted a similar movement for the *Idylls*: the poem’s separate sections move in a spiral cycle, imitating the twelve months of the year and hours of the day by its division into twelve parts; Arthur’s kingdom emerges from chaos and violence and reverts to it, traveling full circle. Its original schema, plotted in “The Epic” was an all-night narration at the year’s turning point, the winter solstice.

Cameron used the annual and diurnal cycles loosely as templates for her two dozen literary *Illustrations*. There are twelve in each volume, the same number as the months in the year or the hours of the day, beginning with innocence and ending with the prospect of death. “Gareth and Lynette” opens Volume One and “Maud” ends Volume Two. Similar to the trajectory the *Idylls*, the *Illustrations* follow a path that moves from early hope to late despair, though their progress is interrupted many times.

However, underneath the apparent unity of *Between the Acts* and the *Idylls*, and reflected in the interstices of the *Illustrations*, lies a chaos similar to that evoked at the
ending of the novel: the anarchic and irrational and primitive Conradian space that Woolf locates as the “heart of darkness, fields of night” lurking below consciousness. The focus of history’s “eye” is enlarged at the end of the novel to include the unconscious and prehistory. The narratorial voice tells us on the last page that “[i]t was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks” (BTA 219). Arthur’s kingdom emerges from and returns to chaos; in 1941 life in Britain was shadowed by the threat of barbarities perpetrated by men who had also reverted to the beast. The protective grace that had been trusted to surround and protect the British Isles no longer walled out danger. The airplane had invaded. Belief in a beneficent deity had eroded.

Under the tidal rhythms of Between the Acts lies a deep sense of disappointment and sadness, relieved by occasional transcendent moments in the pageant and immediately afterward, such as the visionary experience Lucy has by the lily pond, an apparent gift of faith and transcendence (BTA 205). Seeing the gold and silver fish rising from the depths of the pond, helps her to “reach the conclusion that all is harmony, could we hear it. And we shall” (BTA 175). Lucy’s name is derived from “lux,” the element which makes photography possible, though ironically St. Lucy is the patron saint of the blind. The counterpart of Lucy’s high tide of belief, “the old boot on the shingle” (BTA 96, 215), is the doubt exposed by harsh disillusionment. Though Rev. Streatfield is likened to “a tramp’s old boot” (BTA 189), an emblem of what is revealed when the tide recedes, as he stands up to address the audience after the pageant, indicating that though the funds collected that day will illuminate it, the reader and audience are reminded that the church is no longer able to offer ideals of salvation and peace, remaining in the dark.

Woolf leaves us with a mixture of feelings, threaded through with disappointment at the end of her last novel. The reader, audience, and players realize that though La Trobe and
her company have made huge efforts to create the pageant’s illusions, they did not reach everyone and their efforts were ultimately ephemeral at best. For some audience members, the play seemed “brilliantly clever,” a magical illusion that stimulated their imagination, opened new possibilities, and rescued their attention from the imminent war. Others do not resonate with the pageant and call it “utter bosh” (BTA 197). As the memory of the afternoon’s entertainment finally fades and loses its power, it becomes a cloud hanging “in the sky of the mind” going to join other clouds and sinking below the horizon (BTA 212).

Ultimately, the play focuses on the audience, drawing attention to its reactions and suggesting a history of universal connectedness and transcendence that collapses time’s categories into an evolutionary “now.” The pageant’s last act captures the present moment by reflecting the audience to itself in mirrors. Like the Illustrations, it freezes the present moment in photographs. Both Cameron and Woolf’s books make us admit and accept the flawed reality and unsatisfactory aspects of our human life, while challenging us to reach for the roles that lie within ourselves. The mirrored surfaces of the last act, since they are small and fragmented, incompletely reflect the viewers, indicating the impossibility of seeing life steadily or seeing it whole, as Matthew Arnold had optimistically proposed.

At the end of her life Woolf began to relinquish her goal of renewing and enlarging history’s “eye” by the ambitious open-ended effort – collaborative and fluent – with which she had originally imagined it. Cameron’s photographic optics, which had been redemptive in the first volume, similarly began to fade at the end of the Illustrations. As we have seen, the death scenes of Arthur and Elaine plus the sadness of Maud cause the end of the second volume of the Illustrations to be saturated with a sense of eschatological despair as well as the acknowledgement of artistic farewell. Woolf began to realize the futility of her fight against the encroaching threat of fascism, which required the individual to be subsumed in the corporate identity of the whole, sacrificing uniqueness of thought and creativity. She
attempted to expose its specious attractions and substitute a voluntary unity based on artistic performance. She met with many obstacles and discouragement. Ideologies, like the ancient heroisms valorized by Arthurian chivalry, were so ingrained in the culture as to be difficult to supplant with any newly-constructed concept of social organization, especially her theory of Anon, with its indeterminacy and tolerance for all. The artistic work of the community theatre did not hold up as a paradigm for social change against the strength of the well organized and clearly-defined code of fascism.

Some critics regard the pulse of unity and dispersal of the audience throughout La Trobe’s play in a positive light, as the non-coercive, individual response to life that Woolf espoused. Melba Cuddy-Keane, for example, describes Woolf’s ideal as “an ethics of pluralism and a tolerance of diversity, mixed with an equally important connectivity and multivalent interdependency (2008, lxiv). But in *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s hope for the future slowly fades, ultimately becoming counterbalanced by discouragement.

**Ourselves**

We ourselves create the play, as the final scene of the pageant, the mirroring of the audience, demonstrates. “Thank the actors, not the author,” Bart says, “Or ourselves; the audience” (BTA 203). His comment registers and restates the importance of the reader as co-creator of the book’s performance. From the start of the pageant through the end of the novel, the concept of “Ourselves” (BTA 177 to 215), haunts the proceedings. It identifies the communal writers of history, creators of drama, and names the hoped-for flourishing of the Anons of the future. Artificial distinctions of identity among people are erased or at least
blurred through the “ourselves” of the pageant. Most important of all, the word returns us to the “now” of our reading present and of La Trobe’s pageant.

The title of the play’s last scene, “The Present Time: Ourselves” (BTA 177), challenges the audience to assume its parts as players in the pageant – which turns into a photo shoot where the roles are reversed and the audience becomes the main act.265 The audience resists, complaining “that’s cruel. To snap us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume...And only, too, in parts....That’s what’s so distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (BTA 184). They register their resistance in truncated rhyming phrases: “Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. Such an outrage; such an insult; and not plain. Very up to date all the same. What is her game? To disrupt?” (BTA 183).

The inequality of the relationship between photographer and subject as voyeur and prey is clear in the last scene of the pageant. In her novel Jacob’s Room, published almost twenty years before, Woolf had characterized photography as intrusive and voyeuristic in a scene where the eponymous Jacob, while visiting ancient ruins in Greece, looks up to see another tourist, Mme. Lucien Gravé, with "her Kodak pointed at his head” (JR 151). Her action evokes the aggressive capturing of Cameron’s "big head" photographs of famous men. Members of the audience in Between the Acts rebel, murmuring “Other people, perhaps [...] but she won’t get me -- no not me” (BTA 178), as they try to escape from seeing themselves reflected in La Trobe’s camera-like mirrors. They attempt to remain spectators in the green Utopia of the summer afternoon lawn without acknowledging or even perceiving their place in the pageant.

In the mirror scene, Woolf reiterates the importance of the present, a time that belongs to the audience and reader, by freezing it, as if in a photograph: "The hands of the

---

265 Here Woolf anticipates the anti-theatrical performances of late twentieth century productions, such as Peter Handke’s Offending the Audience.
clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves” (BTA 186). The audience has become the material of the present moment, even in its fragmented and uneven state.

Irritated by the audience's unwillingness to cooperate, La Trobe tries “to expose them, to douche them with present time reality” (BTA 178). Seeing that they have not appreciated her effort, but have shied away from confronting themselves, she mutters angrily, “Reality too strong,” [...] “Curse 'em” (BTA 179). The audience, suddenly drenched in a shower of icy reality, tries to hide its vulnerability, a reminder that their fragile selves are the only material of which art is made. Mrs. Manresa uses the mirrors as an opportunity to put on her lipstick (BTA 133). Cameron's photographs capture “ourselves” in various states, whether her sitters were agreeable to that enterprise or not.

The rubric “ourselves” permeates the last half of the novel. Rev. Streatfield puts a theological spin on the concept, observing in a paraphrase of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:25) that “we are members one of another” (BTA 192). Mr. Page, the newspaper reporter, records the pageant itself as “a flattering tribute to ourselves” (BTA 182). Earlier, Lucy had dissolved the division between the present and the past by asserting that the Victorians are “ourselves,” dressed differently. A conversation ensues among the audience after the pageant, further breaking down separations among them. People are essentially the same, their chatter implies, though they come from different countries, commenting that the war refugees are “people like ourselves beginning life again” (BTA 121). The phrase “scraps, orts, and fragments” becomes Woolf’s leitmotif for “ourselves,” as the words thread through to the end of the book.
Rebuilding with “Scraps, orts, and fragments”

As discussed earlier, the anonymous megaphonic voice in *Between the Acts* implies that building the wall of civilization is a way of accomplishing what Woolf describes in *Anon* as “setting up stakes against oblivion” (403), which is accomplished slowly and in small ways: “[o]nly when we put two and two together, two pencil strokes, two written words, two bricks do we overcome dissolution” (Ibid 403). But the challenge of preserving culture is a daunting one and must be attempted with the unsatisfactory materials at hand.

Returning to our earlier discussion of the opening of *Between the Acts*, we note that Woolf observed in the mock-heroic “Prayer to the Nightbird” -- the invocation she intended as an opening for the novel’s working draft -- that the leftover bits and pieces the little bird-muse finds do, after all, contain enough succulence and substance to afford nourishment for the day of the novel (*Pointz Hall* 34–35). The anonymous megaphonic voice implicates the audience members as fragmentary scraps and orts in the pageant’s last scene, “The Present Day, Ourselves”:

*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how’s this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps, and fragments like ourselves?* (BTA 188)

Every scene in the pageant, every image of the *Illustrations*, is a fragment, a brick in the edifice of civilization. In a Benjaminian process of re-constellation, the past is recreated in the novel by a rearrangement of its parts – the people in the audience – into the present moment, ourselves. Similarly, Cameron’s selection and random presentation of people in
often unrelated scenes skews her narrative of English literary history’s originating myths. La Trobe also uses leftover bits for props, turning “sixpenny brooches” and “swabs used to scour saucepans” into “tigers’ eyes” and “cloth of silver” (BTA 76); even more daring is her reconstellation of scenes in England’s history: England, herself a little girl, speaks up in a squeaky voice to begin the pageant, forgetting her lines, while the music accompanying her is miscued (BTA 70), yet the audience and reader put the pieces together mentally to compose a new malleable and unique history in the present time.

Critics have noted that Between the Acts is Woolf’s “most allusive work” (Cuddy-Keane 2008, lii); its allusions, scraps and fragments, form a network of historical and literary references. Numerous other texts are woven through the book, from the Keatsian nightingale that makes a ghostly appearance on the first page to the originary creation story which closes the novel (BTA 219). Most are presented aurally: we hear rhyming thoughts, alphabet songs and nursery rhymes, bits of poetry and newspaper articles quoted by the characters in their conversation and thoughts. There are also subtle ekphrastic references to well-known artwork, even photographs (BTA 16). The designation of Isa’s neck, “broad as a pillar against an arum lily or vine” (BTA 105), evokes early Victorian photographs made in Pre-Raphaelite style. The multiplicity of visual and aural allusions intensifies the sense that a dense network underlies the pageant’s performance, giving it the weight of British culture of every age, whether presented on stage or evoked by association.

The mention of “scraps, orts, and fragments”266 – the nouns as a group and individually – are words that Woolf sprinkled through the last two dozen pages of Between the Acts (BTA 188, 189, 192, & 215). A reference originally derived from Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida, the phrase describes, among other things, Woolf and Cameron’s artistic method of “employ[ing] fragmentation as a new way of seeing” (Cuddy-Keane 1990, 283).

---

266 The phrase appears once in Woolf’s diary (D 5: 290, May 31, 1940), where she uses it to introduce the “scraps” she has observed of daily life occurring around her during the war.
As Woolf’s vivid way of conceptualizing the uneven raggedness of human experience, the phrase conveys more than sustaining quotidian nourishment as in Prayer to the Nightbird; it refers to our blind spots and limitations. These words are embedded in Troilus’ speech late in the play, made in an attempt to convince himself that Cressida's perfidy, which he has just witnessed, is an illusion. He explains her actions by construing them as greasy leftovers from the imagined “divine banquet” of her devotion, a banquet which he is certain belongs to him alone. His rival Diomedes is thus verbally condemned by Troilus's imagination to dine on the banquet’s earthly refuse. He describes his rival’s portion as merely:

The fractions of her faith, ors of her love,
The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics
Of her o'er-eaten faith
(Act V. sc.ii. ll. 165-167)

Woolf hints that the massive self-delusion practiced by Troilus may be necessary for our daily life. Unbelievably, Troilus describes how his stubborn hope motivates him to trust the illusion created by his imagination in his heart, even though it contradicts the facts he has seen and heard with his own eyes and ears:

[...] yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptious functions,
Created only to calumniate.
(Act V. sc.ii ll. 126-130)
Art provides the illusion necessary to sustain life, Woolf intimates, created from the "scraps, orts, and fragments" available, though doing so requires an exercise of faith to be lived out. Modern life consists of pieces that can be made into wholes through the exercise of art's illusion. For Woolf, we ourselves are scraps who, through gathering in community and becoming involved in art, especially performance, can rewrite history through the co-creation of theatrical performance.

However, the artist who offers relief from the anguish of daily life is a counterfeiter as well as a high priest. Anon, incarnated in La Trobe, collaborates with her audience to purvey an illusion that Freud suggests is a form of mass hypnosis, a concept with which Woolf was familiar from her reading. That Troilus can describe his fervent determination to believe and yet state that doing so contradicts the evidence of his senses indicates that though he would like it to be true, he knows his denial of Cressida's perfidy is delusional. "This is and is not Cressid," he says (l. 153), describing the existence in his mind of mutually incompatible realities. He must abjure Aristotelian logic in order to subscribe to this doubled illusion. During the pageant when dramatic illusion fades, reality and necessity inevitably come rushing in, demonstrating that artistic magic is ultimately fleeting. By 1941, modern life had undermined the possibility of absolute certitude and a stable, knowable self.

The dread underlies Between the Acts that theatrical magic could ultimately be insufficient. This suspicion is accompanied by the growing awareness that "By the truth we are undone. Life is a dream. 'Tis waking up that kills us. He who robs us of our dream robs us of our life," as the narrator of Woolf's Orlando declares (O 203). At the low tide of belief, the community playhouse offers merely a pleasant interlude, a midsummer night's distraction – not a working paradigm for society's organization. Doubt prevails for a while.
Then faith returns with the flood tide, and all seems possible again. Variations of hope and dread cause a constant pulse to run through the novel.  

“The Dream”

One of Cameron's early literary illustrations (1869), “The Dream” (fig. 90), a photograph of Milton's wife in the sonnet, “Methought I saw my late espoused Saint,” is relevant here. Cameron illustrated the poem using a soft profile of her maid, Mary Hillier. The photograph is remarkable not only because it is the portrait of a woman whom the poet had never, would never, be able to see, but also because in the photograph Cameron creates the portrait of an insubstantial dream, a ghostly apparition, embodied in the concrete, physical image of her maid. For the poet, grieving and longing for her, his wife’s appearance in the dream represents a small piece of the vision which he believes he will “have/ Full sight of […] in Heav’n without restraint,” a thought that makes her loss more bearable to him. The photograph exemplifies a blind faith similar to that Troilus has that he will enjoy a full banquet of Cressida’s love in heaven, though relegated to “scraps,” “orts,” and “fragments” on earth, as he watches her defection to Diomedes. It also speaks to Cameron’s unwillingness to let go of her personal dreams.

The pageant is ultimately a fleeting experience. For a while after the performance, it lingers in the family’s memory, “moving, diminishing, but still there.” Soon we learn that “[i]n another moment it would be beneath the horizon, gone to join the other plays” (BTA

267 Between the Acts manifests aspects echoed in two other Shakespearean plays: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, with its frame tale, green magic, and play-within-a-play structure, and The Tempest, in which La Trobe, like Prospero, ends the revels at the close of the book, and unlike Merlin renounces the “rough magic.” However, there is no character in the novel left permanently medicated like Demetrius is at the end of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, for whom the illusion will never fade.
It does not sink mournfully "with all we love below the verge", like the sunset-reddened sails of "the days that are no more" in Tennyson's poem, or proceed majestically across the sea as does Arthur's barge on its way to Avalon, but fades quietly and without sentiment in the mind's sky, apparently relegated to a storage space in history's supply room.

The Indian Summer of the Great House

In its setting, Woolf's novel anticipates a future of decline. *Between the Acts* takes place in June 1939, at the summer solstice -- the longest day of the year -- after which the sun's light and warmth begin to leave the earth. The house loses its shelter in the last scene (BTA 219). Woolf at first intended to call the novel *Pointz Hall*, signifying the importance to her of the English great house and the protective role it played as a gathering place for the community and dwelling for the family. The novel is located by these facts at a pivotal moment in British history: the end of the era of the country house, which had played a crucial role of English culture for centuries. In a sense, Pointz Hall itself is the star of the novel. The great house stands as a memorial to a way of life fast vanishing in the twentieth century, under the pressure of war and economic necessity (Girouard 1984, 299-318).

---

268 The house is in many respects the main character of the novel, incorporating the book into the tradition of the novel of manners, with books such as *Mansfield Park, Brideshead Revisited, Howard's End, Heartbreak House*, as well as the *Barchester* novels, and recent cinematic favorites like *Gosford Park* and *Downton Abbey*. 
Cameron and Disappointment

Though Cameron presented herself as relentlessly energetic and optimistic, at the end of her career hints emerge that indicate a darker aspect to her personality, suggesting that she had begun to feel a sense of despair and betrayal. In her autobiographical fragment, written in 1874, she misquotes a line from Tennyson's poem, *The Gardener's Daughter*, in which the narrator, first glimpsing his future bride, remarks that

> [... ] A crowd of hopes,
> That sought to sow themselves like winged seeds,
> Born out of everything I heard and saw,
> Flutter'd about my senses and my soul

(Ricks 1: 557, ll.63-66)

Cameron uses the quotation to describe the intense joy she felt upon first discovering photography ten years earlier, and the high hopes she had for her photographic career. However, she substitutes “winged *lies*” (*Annals 2*) for the poem’s original phrase “winged *seeds*” (italics mine). This verbal slip is a clue to the disappointment Cameron likely felt looking back at her career a dozen years after its start. The word “lies” offers insight into the mixture of feelings that might have lain beneath her sanguine nature.

> What were the putative “hopes” that fluttered around her, seeking to sow themselves? The recent death of her only daughter, her growing ill health, increasing financial distress, and the sadness inherent in her imminent departure for Ceylon, which meant leaving England, her photographic studio, her children, friends and sisters behind are

---

269 This was called to my attention by Martin Meisel.
obvious answers. We cannot know for sure what lay within the “bridal chamber” of her heart; most likely Cameron felt some despair and bitterness at this liminal moment. Her art had not received the recognition she believed it deserved and her career had ended without her having been receive positive response to her vision by the public, despite her best efforts. She could not have anticipated the widespread success her photographs were to achieve in the next century.270

During her life, the press was often unkind in its judgment of Cameron’s work. Her innovative techniques, ahead of its time, shocked critics; nor did being a woman help her become established in the art world. The Photographic Journal, reviewing her submissions – her “big head” portraits of famous men – at the annual exhibition of the Photographic Society of Scotland in 1865 observed:

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. (qtd. in Daniel 1)271

Cameron was thus excluded from the aristocracy of true artists for displaying photography’s supposed flaws, for being of the wrong gender, and “not employ[ing] all the resources at his disposal.” On another occasion the same periodical construed her carefully executed soft focus technique as carelessness: "Slovenly manipulation may serve to cover

270 Over twenty-five Cameron photographs have recently appeared on book covers, in advertisements, on playbills, as well as other venues. The popularity of her work has increased exponentially in the twenty-first century.

want of precision in intention, but such a lack and such a mode of masking it are unworthy of commendation” (Ibid 1). Further, the press would not let Cameron enjoy the recognition she had received from outsiders to the Photographic Society: “She should not let herself be misled by the indiscriminating praise bestowed upon her by the non-photographic press and she would do much better when she has learnt the proper use of her apparatus” (“Report of the Jurors of the Exhibition,” The Photographic Journal ix, 1864).

Henry Peach Robinson, in Pictorial Effect in Photograph, Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscur for Photographers, criticized the work of a certain unnamed photographer, clearly Cameron. The book was art photography’s most influential handbook in the nineteenth century, and one with which she was most likely only too familiar:

Some years ago a number of photographs by a lady – many of them failures from every point of view, but some of them very remarkable for their daring chiaro-scuro, artistic arrangement, and, in some instances, delightful expression – were brought prominently before the public. These pictures [...] received the most enthusiastic praise from artists and critics ignorant of the capabilities of the art, and who [...] attributed the excellences which these photographs undoubtedly [...] possessed, to their defects. These defects were, so little definition that it is difficult even to make out parts in the light; in the shadows it often happens that nothing exists but black paper; so little care whether the sitter moved or not during the enormous exposure [...] that prints were exhibited containing so many images that the most careless operator would have effaced the negative as soon as visible under developer; and, apparently, so much contempt for [...] the proprieties of photography, that impressions from negatives scratched and stained [...] were exhibited as triumphs of art. The arguments of the admirers [...] were, that the excellences existed because of the faults [...] This is not true; and if it were, I should certainly say, Let the merits go; it is not the mission of photography to produce smudges [...] (151).

Robinson concludes his critique of her work by invoking a foundational belief he holds:

“photography is pre-eminently the art of definition, and when an art departs from its function, it is lost” (Ibid 151).
Dr. Wilhelm Hermann Vogel, Professor of Photography at the Institute of Technology in Berlin, who was at the time Germany’s leading writer on photography and editor of *Photographische Mitteilungen*, in a letter regarding arrangements for the exhibition mixed harsh criticism with appreciation:

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. ... But, little as these pictures moved the photographers who only looked for sharpness and technical qualities in general, all the more interested were the artists ... [who] praised their artistic value, which is so outstanding that technical shortcomings hardly count. (later published in *The Photographic News*, June 23, 1865:291-2)

These criticisms surely stung Cameron, though she maintained in the *Annals* that she could keep them in perspective and maintain pride in her work.

She covered the hurt so effectively that her contemporary, the landscape photographer P.H. Emerson, observed “Mrs. Cameron took no notice whatever of these busybodies; she treated them with silent contempt. I cannot find a single communication of hers to the photographic press.” He went on to say prophetically, “When the true history of photography shall come to be written, their day of reckoning will dawn and then they will be pilloried, and their names disgraced” (qtd. in Handy 1994, 311, 314).272 Emerson’s assumptions that Cameron was impervious to her critics were based on the silence she maintained; he did not know her personally, and could not have gauged the effects of the press’s commentary on her, especially at a time when she was most vulnerable -- at the end of her career. Like La Trobe, Cameron aimed to give her audience a gift, and when the “[i]llusion had failed” and gone unappreciated, she too was devastated, feeling she had

---

272 Though Emerson found Cameron’s portrait photography to be of “towering supremacy,” he did not like her Illustrations, remarking that “outside of portraiture she was a failure” (Ibid. 310).
suffered a little “death” (BTA 140). Though in possession of a redoubtably ebullient personality, Cameron was not immune to harsh criticism of her work.

Though Woolf describes Cameron’s last years in Ceylon as lush and idyllic (VP 19), the photographer fell “seriously ill” upon her arrival there, finding it difficult to adjust to a climate which taxed her already labored breathing and was not conducive to her photographic work. Only twenty-six photographs – none of them tableaux – remain from her years in Ceylon, as opposed to the thousands she had taken in England. It was a time which she characterized with equivocal restraint, as being “a most acceptable monotony” (Olsen 247-248). “Think of us in a little hut with only mud walls, four hundred feet above the level of the sea” she wrote to Emily Tennyson. To Henry Taylor she confessed, “I only hope I shall have strength of body, elasticity of spirits and bravery of heart eno’ to stand it” (Bodleian MS Eng. Lett. D. 17 fol. 69). Like Woolf, Cameron faced challenges made harder to bear by the feeling that she had lost her audience, without which it was difficult to persevere.

Disillusionment and Despair

As war reached England, Leonard and Virginia Woolf felt increasingly anxious and vulnerable about the future. Woolf wrote in her diary on May 14, 1940, that they were “being led up garlanded to the altar” (D5: 284). Since both had fearlessly published critiques of Nazism, they were targeted as enemies of the Reich, their names listed as #115 and #116 on the Nazis’ secret arrest list for England (Froula 287). Leonard’s Quack Quack! (Hogarth Press, 1935) contained outspoken criticism of Hitler and Mussolini, and Virginia’s essay
“Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” -- published in The New Republic in 1940 -- attacked what she called “Hitlerism.” They had both fearlessly drawn attention to their views.

In the winter of 1940, while finishing Between the Acts, Woolf felt a severe depression enveloping her. That British civilization was at risk was clear. The war had touched the Woolfs’ life: their London home at 37 Mecklenburgh Square had been destroyed, and one of their former dwellings on Tavistock Square, had been damaged. The Hogarth Press was gone. They made a mutual suicide plan to prepare for possible invasion. Taking action, they felt, would be preferable to waiting for death at the hands of ruthless enemies. Virginia had continued to write in her last years in a vain effort to muster hope against the darkness that was encroaching. She became certain that she must bid farewell to the cultivated English life she had lived; Between the Acts, with all its ambivalence, is an elegy for that life.

Woolf had put great effort into her books, offering her ideas to the public in the hope not only of making a contribution to the arts and culture of the time but also to suggest creative solutions to social ills. Like Ida, she wanted to believe that her books would speak for her, opening up possibilities for others who would follow.

Leonard Woolf, in a volume of his autobiography written years after his wife’s death, admitted having been mystified by the importance she placed on her writing. He found the deep connection she had to her books inexplicable and was puzzled by the comfort it gave her to believe they would survive her:

I could never quite understand Virginia’s feeling about her books and their reputation in the world. She seemed to feel their fate to be almost physically and mentally part of her fate. I do not think she had any belief in life after death, but she appeared to feel that somehow or other she was involved in their life after her death. Being so intimately a part of herself, a hurt to them was felt as a hurt to her, and her mortality or immortality was a part of their mortality or immortality. (205-6)
Woolf’s vulnerability to the welfare of her books and her desire for their wide audience, was not, as Leonard seems to suggest, only a matter of personal pride. The popularity of her books was proof to Woolf that her ideas were effective and her art was reaching a wide audience at a time when audience was crucial to her. The loss of her public’s response to those books in wartime, which had suspended their publication, meant that she was losing her battle for equality and peace. Like Ida’s had through the force of necessity, Anon’s voice was growing silent.

Death as the Loss of One’s Audience

As Walter Benjamin observed in 1936, a storyteller needs an audience. Writing in the shadow of war, near the time of his own death, he, like Woolf, sensed tragedy in the loss of the storyteller, a tragedy equivalent to the death of Anon.

Familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant. […] One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value […] For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power.273

By the time she began writing Between the Acts, Woolf was virtually exiled to Monk’s House near the rural village of Rodmell by the bombing of London. She felt in these last years that she had no one to write for and thus, she was being eliminated from the public arena. She felt disconnected from the readers who had given her life: “It struck me that one

curious feeling is, that the writing ‘I,’ has vanished. No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death” (D 5: 293, June 9, 1940). Detached and disappointed at this point in her life, she felt she was no longer able to perpetuate and strengthen Anon’s efforts. At almost exactly the same age as Woolf was when she wrote the above passage in her diary, Cameron also severed the connection with her English “audience” by moving to Ceylon.

Frank Kermode, in his book, The Sense of an Ending, suggests that for artists, “the End is a figure for their own deaths” (7). If that is true, the Illustrations ends with as great a finality than Between the Acts. As suggested earlier, in Anon, Woolf observes that the bond between performer and audience had been broken in 1485 by the publication of Le Morte d’Arthur, which she believed to be the first book printed in England. The appearance of the Arthurian legends in print, in a codified version, had severed the performer’s close connection with her audience, fraying the bond necessary for their mutual creativity, and ultimately threatening Anon’s death. However, Woolf suggests a way in which this crucial connection could be preserved with the aid of the reader’s imagination, in a different medium, on a different platform.

Woolf believed that the theatre of Anon, whether performed on the stage or page, could bring life to its audience by expressing the “deep sunk” “common emotion” at the heart of literature.274 Both the Illustrations and La Trobe’s pageant, using the creative imagination of the viewer, transfer theatre from external performance to its enactment within the reader’s mind. Creativity has the power to move humanity through performance, offering the experience of human presence even after the theatre has been shut down. At the end of Woolf’s novel, La Trobe – sitting in silence, without her echo – dreams and hears words that rise up from the fertile mud of her mind, “Words without meaning – wonderful

---

274 Woolf describes these universal feelings as existing in a “world beneath our consciousness, the anonymous world to which we can still return” in Anon (385).
words.” They comprise the “the first words” (BTA 212), the beginning lines of another theatrical performance, another play performed in her mind.

In her imagination, as if a figure for Anon, La Trobe the playwright connects in this new performance with the scene occurring at Pointz Hall at that very moment. The last page of the novel describes its beginning. The reader’s vision enlarges as if the camera photographing the scene had retracted to a great distance and the night had become “night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks” (BTA 219). The play begins, “Then the curtain rose. They spoke” (BTA 219). Anon’s performance will renew itself indefinitely through the imagination, as she continues to set up stakes against oblivion, for

Now and again Nature creates a new part, an original part. The actors who act that part always defy our attempts to name them. They will not act the stock parts – they forget the words, they improvise others of their own.

(“Ellen Terry” 1940, CE 4: 72)

Afterwork

While The Theatre of Anon investigates a rich area for research – the convergence of the work and life of two major British literary figures addressed through the life and work of a Victorian photographer – it is a small study, too focused to allow for the continuation of concepts past the conclusions reached. There are several yet unexplored directions that merit attention. Research on Victorian visuality, media, and literature is burgeoning;
studying the role photography has played in its development, especially in previously overlooked areas, such as John A. Whipple’s moon photographs and their relationship to Sir John Herschel and the transatlantic Great Moon Hoax, could explore the interface between photography and science fiction. Working on this project has pointed the way to two cultural developments occurring in the twentieth century and after, that are especially intriguing to me: the work of Cameron’s legacy and the materialization of Woolf’s hopes for collaborative democracy through new media and communications.

Cameron initiated a tradition of photographs featuring women in well-known literary and classical roles. Two talented women who followed in her wake, taking such photographic portraits, are Mme. Yevonde in 1930’s England, and the contemporary photographer Cindy Sherman in this country. Woolf’s suggestion of a democratic, mutually reciprocal community as a desirable paradigm for social organization has begun to materialize in the twenty-first century, brought about through the digital revolution and advances in telecommunications, which have made the dream of a connected global society possible.

**Cameron Photographs Ellen Terry**

Addressing Cameron’s photographs in relationship to those of Yevonde and Sherman would prove a useful undertaking, especially in the context of Cameron’s images of Ellen Terry. The actress posed for two pictures in 1864, during the year she lived on West Wight, affording both Cameron and G.F. Watts the opportunity to make portraits of her. Dame Ellen Terry and Sir Henry Taylor are the two Victorians addressed in this dissertation.
who influenced the work of both Cameron and Woolf, thus spanning the Victorian and Edwardian periods in their influence.

The softly-focused photograph of Ellen Terry, to which Cameron gave the title, “The South West Wind” (fig. 94), shows the face of an elfin sixteen-year-old framed in streaming hair that seems to float above a current of white gauzy fabric. The photo conveys a sense of the young woman’s nimble grace and rebellious spirit. She had released the same flowing hair years before, in a moment of boredom in the drawing room of Little Holland House, evoking the shocked and vehement disapproval of her elders (Hill 77).

In contrast, the sharply-focused “Sadness,” the best-known of Cameron’s portraits of the young actor, shows her stilled in apparent melancholy. The particular version I have chosen as an example of “Sadness” (fig. 95) is the original wet collodion-albumin print appearing in Woolf’s Victorian Photographs. The emulsion has cracked and lifted up from part of the image and is peeling away from the portrait, suggesting the tearing apart of Terry’s heart by the emotional pain she was presumably undergoing as her marriage to Watts disintegrated. It is an intimate scene – Cameron posed her carefully against the patterned wall in Tennyson’s bathroom at Farringford: her downcast eyes in close proximity to the wedding ring on the hand that has been prominently raised to face level, and her décolletage suggest that it is a nightdress that exposes her shoulders. Terry famously left Freshwater and her much older husband before her seventeenth birthday, escaping the unconsummated marriage that had been engineered by Cameron and her sister Sara. Nina Auerbach, however, argues that “Sadness” is a performance in which Terry convincingly plays the role of injured spouse for Cameron’s lens; in her memoir Terry describes her marriage to G.F. Watts as a happy one. According to Auerbach (1997, 99) Terry knots her necklace in a “self-strangling” gesture as part of the act.
In 1875, eleven years later, Cameron’s printer repaired the original image, smoothing over the torn layer, and made multiple crisp copies of “Sadness,” using a carbon print process. In making these prints, he reversed the glass plate negative so that Terry seems to be looking in the opposite direction, toward the camera (http://www.getty.edu), and retitled the photo “Ellen Terry at Sixteen” – probably as a publicity move to illustrate her biography and sell photographs to fans as her career began to take off.

**Cameron’s two Twentieth-Century Photographic Heirs:**

**Mme. Yevonde and Cindy Sherman**

It is tempting to speculate how Cameron’s legacy was taken up by two successful, innovative, and pioneering women photographers in the next century. In 1914, at the age of twenty-one, Yevonde Middleton set up a photographic studio in London, calling herself “Mme Yevonde,” to make color portraits and illustrations for advertisements. The resulting photographs have been associated by art historians with surrealism in photography. A gallery of her work is available for perusal at www.mmeyevonde.com. Mme. Yevonde became famous in the 1930’s for her pioneering experimentation with the brilliant new Vivex color process, an enhancement that renders her portraits of society women posed as goddesses especially arresting. A supporter of women’s rights and the suffragist movement, Yevonde Middleton likely knew of Woolf, though there is no record of any interchange between the two. Her photos respond to the times in which they were taken by her careful choice of roles and talent for bringing out aspects of the women who acted the parts in
which she cast them. Little critical discussion has been published on these photographs, or on the life of Mme. Yevonde and her sitters, though her portraits are singularly arresting.

Mme. Yevonde took the photo “Minerva” in profile, emphasizing the goddess’s thoughtful vigilance. Against a rough black background, this Minerva stands out in a glowing saffron robe, her head half hidden by a helmet, its black chin strap diagonally bisecting the right side of her face. She is accompanied by the emblems of wisdom: her books and a stuffed owl, her medium. Portrayed by Lady Aileen Balcon, wife of Sir Michael Balcon, founder of Ealing Motion Picture Studios, Minerva is gearing up for battle in this image, holding a cocked pistol in her elaborately manicured hands. The photo was displayed in 1935 as part of Mme. Yevonde’s “Gallery of Goddesses.” Aileen Balcon was the daughter of Jewish refugee parents who, after fleeing the pogroms of Russia, had settled in England. Yevonde’s interpretation shows Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, as a stately young woman armed and ready to attack, as if in anticipation of oncoming war.

The nearly nude portrait of the actress Gertrude Lawrence whom Yevonde cast as the Muse of Comedy radiates a very different aura. Lighthearted and playful, with her guitar, spangled bridal veil, and crown of flowers, Lawrence is a more whimsical and sophisticated version of Thalia than any nineteenth-century representation, though she bears the legacy of Cameron’s portraits of women muses. Lawrence is shown as a musician, like the bird-muse of Woolf’s novel, her photo evoking the two unsmiling female musician singers of The Princess photographs (figs. 42 & 44). She resembles an impish fairy more than she does the classical muse of comedy.

Cameron reputedly once locked an unsuspecting model in a closet for several hours to achieve the despairing facial expression she wanted for the photograph she called “Despair” (fig. 93). Similarly, Mme. Yevonde achieved a desired expression of grief on the face of Lady Malcolm Campbell, the model for her portrait of Niobe, through induced
suffering. As she tells the story, in order to make Dolly Campbell’s eyes appear "dim with tears and much weeping," for the portrait of Niobe, Yevonde mixed glycerin with Vaseline and applied it to Campbell’s face, accidentally getting some in her eyes, which “caused such exquisite pain that Dolly wept real tears and for some minutes could do nothing but sit in misery, pressing her handkerchief against the agony. When at last she could look up, her eyes were bloodshot and her expression so miserable that I rushed the focus and was able to take a face expressive of the utmost sorrow and pain” (Yevonde qtd. in Williams 124).

Dolly Campbell’s husband, referred to in the press as a “maniac,” broke the world land-speed racing record nine times, his near-death escapades giving his wife much practice in enduring pain.

As a college student in the 1970’s, Cindy Sherman took up photography after having found “nothing more to say in paint.” Thus began a career that has rung radical changes on women’s portrait photography for the past four decades – a career already nearly four times as long as Cameron’s. Sherman’s work has helped secure a dominant place for the photograph in the world of art.

The correspondences between Cameron and Shermans’ portraits relate to the basic facts of their craft. Like Cameron, Sherman is a woman artist who takes pictures of women enacting various assumed roles. She often uses "scraps, orts, and fragments” like those Cameron worked with, ingeniously making her art from sometimes unlikely, often domestic props, settings, and costumes. In the 1990’s, Sherman published a series of portraits of herself based on readily recognizable canonical paintings. Though these impersonations are ironic and exaggerated, they evoke Cameron’s own approximations of famous artwork, such as Guido Reni’s “Beatrice,” the Elgin marbles, and her numerous Madonnas.

---

275 The book has recently been republished as *History Portraits*, NY: Schirmer Mosel, 2012.
Other than these considerations, the two women’s work is very different: Sherman’s photographs are more sophisticated, varied, and complex than Cameron’s. Her choice of styles and subjects, though always self-referential, have continued to evolve over the years, moving from gentle irony through versions of social commentary that have amazed, seduced, shocked, and even repulsed the public. Her viewers do not always recognize that the model for all her portraits is Sherman herself, or understand her work’s “parodic, burlesque, and mordant social critique” (E. Smith 19). Sherman’s art constitutes a postmodern demonstration of a woman’s freedom to choose her persona, her way of presenting herself to the world, with the fluidity and freedom that Woolf described as a bonus of being female in *Three Guineas*.

**Woolf’s Ideas Evolve into the Twenty-first Century:**

**The Effect of the Digital Revolution, New Media, and Telecommunications**

*“The study of literary history is the study of media history”*[^276]

In presenting herself through such disparate self-portraits, Sherman demonstrates the possibilities and liabilities that come with making up one’s persona for public consumption – a process of self-construction emphasized and intensified in this century by our expanded digital community. Privacy has all but disappeared, thanks to tracking tools.

and the collection of digital data, yet more than any previous time in history an individual can construct a different self for each of the multiple media occasions in which s/he desires or is required to appear. Cindy Sherman’s examples of self-commodification are symptomatic of this self-creation, a process that becomes easier and yet simultaneously more problematized by digital communications almost daily, especially with the advent of social media. Her photographs function as cautionary tales for the quotidian existential process of creation.

When Woolf conceived of an equitable, laterally-spread out collaborative democracy, which she embodied in the metaphor of Anon’s community theatre, a platform capable of accommodating mutually exclusive perspectives in scenes from past, she could not have imagined the world stage that has evolved as a result of new media and advances in telecommunications. The possibilities for investigation of this area are plentiful.

Cameron’s use of the new photographic technology paired with ancient ideology and poetry anticipated some subsequent combinations of old and new. Many of Marshall MacLuhan’s predictions from fifty years ago have come to pass. The digital age has exploded in multiple directions almost simultaneously: filmic, graphic, aural, hypertext links invite co-collaboration. The open forum of the worldwide web has turned anyone and everyone with access into a participant. The formerly silent have been given a voice and a platform from which to help write the common history Woolf envisioned. Global communications seems to offer a pou sto on which to stand to change the world.

The resulting revolution has many unanticipated flaws, however, causing unforeseen dilemmas on a grand scale. Instead of forming the transcendent bonds of collaboration that Woolf imagined would result from democratic co-creation, the explosion of global telecommunications and digital media, threatens to result in more ingrained isolation and entrenched opinions. Each of us alone with our digital connections can create
an echo chamber of sources for ourselves that merely reinforce our beliefs and preconceived notions rather than expanding them.

Contemporary media has precluded the possibility of creating cultural heroes like those of the past. New media “heroes” will never be Arthurs. Educated viewers have become more skeptical of pictorial “truth,” of which there is an overwhelming diversity, photography representing only one area. Leaders are vulnerable to intense and immediate public scrutiny, and can no longer be universally glorified for possessing uncomplicated wisdom, goodness and strength. What effect this will have on national identity remains to be seen.

Trapped in Metaphor

Arthurian chivalry, the photographic studio, country house, and community theatre are incomplete as governing metaphors for human experience, as all theoretical constructs and paradigms have to be. Woolf tried to find a trope that could adapt to the provisional nature of each succeeding conception of life, settling on the pageant as a conceit that could support every era’s imaginative construction as a separate and valuable scene, part of the whole of human history. The community theatre with its historical pageant offers a vision of unity and hope, but it, too, inevitably fails to accommodate all of human experience.

The failure of master paradigms, while defeating the inborn human desire to organize and comprehend reality, leaves space for diverse new conceptions to arise. The continual insufficiency of each master template to encompass life makes less likely the return of dominant totalizing narratives like those previously accepted as historical truth.
Each time a controlling metaphor proves inadequate and crumbles, it opens up space for new provisional truths to be formulated, enlarging the understanding of human experience.
CHAPTER SIX

The Photographs:
A Facsimile Edition
of

Julia Margaret Cameron's

Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Other Poems

VOLUME ONE
ILLUSTRATIONS
TO TENNYSON’S
IDYLLS OF THE KING,
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY
JULIA MARGARET CAMERON.

HENRY S. KING & Co.,
65. CORNHILL, AND 13, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1875.

Fig. 1
Title Page [Vol. 1]
Fig. 2

Dedication [Vol. 1]
TO MRS. CAMERON.

Let 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 skilful art and wise.
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 lovest all loveliness! and many a face
Is press'd and summoned from the brazen 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.

CHARLES TURNER. (Tennyson.)
Fig. 4

“The Dirty Monk” [Vol. 1]
“Gareth and Lynette” [Vol. 1]
Fig. 6

“Gareth and Lynette” [Vol. 1]
Fig. 7

"Geraint and Enid" [Vol. 1]
Fig. 8

“Enid” [Vol. 1]
Geraint and Enid.

So faced it with Geraint, who thought and said:
"Sure by God's grace, is the one done for me."

As changed the song that used daily swene
of Fortune and her wheel, and fate says:

"Sure Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower this roundly
it to the wheel that was spinning always and truly.
The wheel and the one we neither love nor hate.

Sure fortune, turn thy wheel with smile a frowning
with that wild while we go not up or down;
our round is little, but our heart is great.

Smile, and we smile, the lords of many lands;
known, and we smile, the lords of seven lands;
The wheel is made, and master of his fate.

Sure, turn thy wheel above the spinning round;
thy wheel while there are shadows in the sky;
thy wheel and then we neither love nor hate.

A Llwyd

Fig. 9

"Geraint and Enid" [Vol. 1]
Fig. 10

"And Enid Sang" [Vol. 1]
Merlin and Vivien

he was mute

So dark a fœtus threat did about his brain,
As on a dull day in an ocean came
The blind are see the round his long a half
In silence: whereas when she lifted up
A face of sad appeal, and spake and said,
O Merlin, do ye love me? and again
O Merlin do ye love me? and once more;
O great Master do ye love me? he was mute.

Who loins Vivien, looking by his head,
With her trained knees, steered up his seat back
Behind, his ankles turned his hollow fat
Together, curved his arms about his neck.
Close till a break; and looking to her left hand
Drawn from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf
M ade with her right; a comb of pearl about
The list of such abroad as Youth gone out
And left in ashes.

A. Tompkins.
Fig. 12

"Vivien and Merlin" [Vol. 1]
Merlin and Vivien

To Merlin overtalk'd and concern'd
And yielded, told her all the falsehood.

There in one moment the staff fell the chain
Of worst pain and if misery bounds
And in the hollow end be lacerated,
Life lost to life and love, and man unwise.
Fig. 14

"Vivien and Merlin" [Vol. 1]
Lancelot and Elaine

Alaine the fair, Alaine the lovesome,
Alaine the lady maid of Astolat;
Nigh in her chamber, upon time to the last,
Girded the sword, shield of Lancelot;
At her feet the plumed crest. Moaning's in melody
Wingeth thine, with the plume;
Thine flouring next, a gilded fimbriam fit;
A rose of red, and bordered therein;
All the devices blazoned on the shield.
In their own hand, and addeth, of her side;
A border fanning of branch and flower;
And yellow-merged, wrestill in the West.

Humphrey

Fig. 15

"Lancelot and Elaine" [Vol. 1]
Fig. 16

“Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat” [Vol. 1]
“Lancelot and Elaine” [Vol. 1]
Fig. 18

“So in her tower alone the maiden sat,

His very shield was gone; only the case” [Vol. 1]
The Holy Grail.

But she, the fairest maid, showed away,
Clearer from her forehead all that wealth, whose
Which made a silver workwork for the first:
Against it she planted broad and long.
A silver sword-belt, wide, wore with silver bands.
And reason in the hall a staring device,
A precious grail within a silver box.
And saw the knight, say knight, and brandish it in him,
Saying, My knight, my love, my knight of honor,
O my love, whose love is one with mine.
I, maiden, remove thee, maiden, bend thy knees.
Je forte, for this shall be what I have seen
And breach thee, all, till one will cross the sea.
For in the spiritual city.

Hunyadi
Fig. 20

“Sir Galahad and the Nun” [Vol. 1]
Acid become ever prominent, but remain Acid still they met and met. Again they said, 'O Lancelot, if you lose me yet the more.' And then they were agreed upon a night (when the good thing should not be late) tiller tiller lost part for ever. Passion made light and green.

A. Smugon.
Fig. 22

"The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" [Vol. 1]
And while he spoke to them his kingly word
To which for each the golden dragon slung
Of Brittain; to the did not see the face,
Which there was the light, but she saw;
But with the mind, and written in delight.
The Dragon of the great Adergonynyd
Village, making all the night a delight of joy.
And even then she tired of it; and come and more.

The needy vapour rolling round the king,
Who saw of the phantom of a saint; did it,
From round their fold by fold, and much more:
And grasp, till himself became as dust.
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Fig. 23
“Guinevere” [Vol. 1]
Fig. 24

"King Arthur" [Vol. 1]
GUINEVERE.
A fair statey queen abroad,
In moving a walk, adorned among the trees.
She with her train did, her sight to house in wondrous height in her sight, for moment a for length.

Bad commanded, only with the little maid
She spake he with a stringy heart.
This mighty woman wildly broke a heart.

Came, that at midnight made too late the kai
And lengthen sport with the kai, while the king

But with what a hate, the people and the king
Which hate me, and love it down when he thought!
Send to the little maid, words heart felt
No licence, breaks its willing ethics! So late!

What love, I broke now? said when she desar-
No answer, to cold and began to frozen

Our are the kai had taught, so late, so late!
Which when she heard, the queen look it up, said, said,

I wonder, if indeed ye look to slay,

And indeed I was thought that long sleep!

Wantred fell willfully sung the little birds.

Late, late, so late! need Here, need child!
Late, late, so late! but we once settle child.

So late, so late! ye answered, better now.

The light had ever: for that, let do ye subject.

And learning thus the pigeon will skitt.
So late, too late! ye answered, better now.

The light; so late! need dark, and still the light!

O here, in, that we angry feel the light!

Too late, too late! ye answered, better now.

Now we, such heard, the pigeon will now.

O late, in the late! to hide his feel!

So sorry the science,

R. T唇唇
Fig. 26

“The Little Novice and the Queen Guinevere in the Holy House at Almesbury” [Vol. 1]
"The Passing of Arthur" [Vol. 1]
Fig. 28

"The Passing of Arthur" [Vol. 1]
Chapter Six, Continued

The Photographs of

Julia Margaret Cameron’s

Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King and Other Poems

VOLUME TWO
ILLUSTRATIONS
TO TENNYSON'S
IDYLLS OF THE KING,
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY
JULIA MARGARET CAMERON.

HENRY S. KING & Co.
65, CORNHILL, AND 12, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1875

Fig. 29
Title Page [Vol. 2]
Dedicated
by gracious permission to
Her Imperial and Royal Highness

Victoria,
The Crown Princess of Germany and Prussia,
and Princess Royal

Julia Margaret Cameron

Fig. 30
Dedication Page [Vol. 2]
TO MRS. CAMERON.

Let! 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 skilful art and wise.
The Sun obeys thy gestures, and allows
Thy guiding hand, wher'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 summoned from the bracey 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.

CHARLES TURNER. (Tennyson.)
Fig. 32

Frontispieces [Vol. 2]
The May Queen.

"The May Queen" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 34

"For I’m to be Queen of the May, Mother,
I’m to be Queen of the May" [Vol. 2]
"New Year's Eve" [Vol. 2]
"He thought of that sharp look Mother I gave him yesterday"

"They call me cruel hearted, I care not what they say" [Vol. 2]
"The End" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 38

“The End” [Vol. 2]
The Princess.

The stood

Among her maidens, higher by the head,
Her back against a pillar, her foot upon
Of those stone supports. Kitten-like she crouched. And pawed about her sandal. I drew near; I gazed.

H. A. Byron.
Fig. 40

*The Princess* [Vol. 2]
The Princess

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snow on summits old in story;
The long light-shakes across the lakes
And the wild calmer laps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, let the wind catch you:
Blow, bugle; answer, echo, dying, dying, dying.

O harp, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and sea,
The horns of Upland faintly blowing.
Blow, let us hear the purple gloom replied
Blow, bugle; answer, echo, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they lie in your rich sky,
They paint on hills, on fields, on rivers;
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, let the wind catch you:
And answer, echo, dying, dying, dying.
Fig. 42

“The Splendour Falls on Garden Walls” [Vol. 2]
The Princess

Now she sat, some one said there, legless in more

The minutes fled as with music, and a maid

Of more beside her, wrote her kept, and sang.

"Have, idle tears, I know what they mean,

Tears from the depths of some divine desire

As in the heart, and gather to the eye;

In looking on the happy lifetime’s end,

And thinking of the days that are no more.

"Plush as the first beam glittering on a sail,

That brings our friends up from the undercity,

And as the East which shoots from one

That marks with all we love below the sky;

So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

"Oh, stab and strange, as in dark somnambulism,

The tallest pipe of half-awakened birds

To dying ears, when winds are stirring up

The candle slowly open a gleaming space

So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

"Dear as remembered, tears after death

And lined as these, by hopeless fancy piled

On lips that are for others, deep as being.

Deep as first love, and wild with all envoy

O Death in life, the days that are no more!"

N. K. M.
Fig. 44

"Tears, Idle Tears" [Vol. 2]
Marianas

(with bluested, most the flower-plots
were thickly crusted, one and all;
the veiled sails fell from the bows-
that held the Fear to the gable-walls.
The broken clouded oaks and strange;
indistinct was the climbing catch-;
weisted and worn the ancient watch
upon the lonely moated grange.

The only said, "My life is drear.
He cometh not." She said;
She said, "I am weary, weary,
I would that I were dead."
Fig. 46

“Mariana” [Vol. 2]
The Beggar Maid.

Her arms across her breast she laid;
She was more fair than words can say:
Rose-foiled was the beggar maid
Before the King Cophetua.

In robe and crown the king stole down,
So met and greet her on her way;
"It is no wonder," said the lords,
"She is more beautiful than day."

As shines the moon in clouded skies,
She in her poor attire was seen:
One praised her ankles, one her eyes,
One her dark hair and lovelorn chin.
So sweet a face, such angel grace,
In all that land had never been:
Cophetua swore a royal oath:
"This beggar maid shall be my queen!"

P. B. Shelley

Fig. 47

"The Beggar Maid" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 48

"King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 49

"Lancelot and Elaine" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 50

“Elaine” [Vol. 2]
Lancelot and Elaine.

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

While thus they bobbed of the king, the king
Come, girl with knights; then turn of the tongue-woman.
Now the half face to the full eye, and rose
And present, to the damsel, and the door.
So Arthur said the mark, Sir Perceval,
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the mail;
And secretly they bore her into hall.
Then came the fairest woman and wonder at her,
And Lancelot later came, and smudg'd her.
And laid the queen herself and follied her;
But Arthur speed the letter in her hand,
Stoof, took, broke seal, and read it; this word:

Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I sometime called the maids of Estella,
Come, for you left me taking me farewell;
Neither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no motion,
And therefore my love is sinne and mist
And therefore to our lady, my love,
And to all other ladies, I make known.
May my soul and yeild me burial:
May for my soul there too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight, peerless;

Thus he read.

And rose in the rending, Lord Sir James
Left, looking often from his face, who said.
To his which lay so silent, and at times,
To touch'd were they, half thinking thereby,
Who had devis'd the letter, proved again.

A l'insigne.
Fig. 52

“The Corpse of Elaine in the Palace of King Arthur” [Vol. 2]
Then spake the King: 

"The passing of Arthur" [Vol. 2]
Fig. 54

"King Arthur wounded lying in the barge" [Vol. 2]
Maud.

There has fallen a splendid tear
From the Passion-flowers at the gate;
She is coming, my love, my dear;
She is coming, my life, my fate.
The red rose weeps, "She is near, she is near;"
And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"
The lark spurs listening, "Hear, hear;"
And the lily whispers, "I wait;"
The is coming, my own, my sweet,
Were it ever so weary a head,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthly bed;
My dust would hear her and beat
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red.

Tennyson

Fig. 55

"Maud" [Vol. 2]
Chapter Six, Continued

The Photographs of

The Miniature Edition of Julia Margaret Cameron's

*Illustrations to Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Other Poems*
Sonnet

by Charles Turner (Tennyson)

To Mr. Cameron.

Do! Modern Beauty lends her lips and eyes
To tell an ancient story. They had brought
Into thy picture, all once fancy sought.
In that old time, with skilful art and wise,
The sun obeys thy visions, and allows
Thy guiding hand, where 'er thou hadst a mind
To turn his passive light upon Mankind,
And let his deal, and thine on chosen bow.
Then love all loneliness! and many a face
Is prescid and summoned, from the steep shores
On thine immortal charts to take its place.
While near at hand the jealous Ocean lay,
His noblest Tritons would thy subject be,
And all his fairest Nereids sit to thee.
Fig. 58

"The Childhood of Alice and Effie" [Miniature Edition]
Fig. 59

“Guinevere” [Miniature Edition]
Fig. 60

"Guinevere" [Miniature Edition]
"The Gardener's Daughter"

" indure" read, this wonder kept the house,
He nodded, but a moment afterward
He cried, "look, look" before he saw it
And ere a slater took, beheld her there.

For up the porch there grew an Eastern rose
That flowering high, the last light caught 

And blown across the walk, the drew aloft,

Gown'd in pure white, that filled the space,
Holding the bush, of it back she stood

A guile through of all her soft brown hair.

Pur'd on one side, the shadow of the flowers
Into all the golden slow, and wafting

Downly lower, humbled on her walk.

Fig. 61

Fig. 62


---. "Patriarchy, Dead Men, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*." *Victorian Poetry* 30.3-4, Autumn-Winter, 1992: 401-17. Print.


Weaver, Mike. *Julia Margaret Cameron 1815-1879.* Exhibition Catalog, the Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK: U of Southampton P, 1984. Print.


Works Consulted


Appendix A

Part One:

Julia Margaret Cameron’s Autobiography

Annals of My Glass House

Mrs. Cameron’s Photography, now ten years old, has passed the age of lisping and stammering and may speak for itself, having traveled over Europe, America and Australia, and met with a welcome which has given it confidence and power. Therefore, I think that the Annals of My Glass House will be welcome to the public, and, endeavouring to clothe my little history with light, as with a garment, I feel confident that the truthful account of indefatigable work, with the anecdote of human interest attached to that work, will add in some measure to its value.

That details strictly personal and touching the affections should be avoided, is a truth one’s own instinct would suggest, and noble are the teachings of one whose word has become a text to the nations --

Be wise; not easily forgiven

Are those, who setting wide the doors that bar

The secret bridal chamber of the heart

Let in the day.

277 The manuscript of this fragment, held by the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, is dated “c.1874.” First published posthumously in an exhibition catalog of “Mrs. Cameron’s Photographs” at the Camera Gallery, London, in 1889, it was reprinted in Beacon 2 (July 1890, 157-160) and again in Photographic Journal 67 (July 1927, 296-301) before becoming widely anthologized in books about Cameron.

278 From Tennyson’s “The Gardener’s Daughter” (ll.242-245).
Therefore it is with effort that I restrain the overflow of my heart and simply state that my first lens was given to me by my cherished departed daughter and her husband, with the words, "It may amuse you, Mother, to try to photograph during your solitude at Freshwater."

The gift from those I loved so tenderly added more and more impulse to my deeply seated love of the beautiful, and from the first moment I handled my lens with a tender ardour, and it has become to be as a living thing, with voice and memory and creative vigour. Many and many a week in the year '64 I worked fruitlessly, but not hopelessly-

_A crowd of hopes_

_That sought to sow themselves like winged lies_

_Born out of everything I heard and saw_

_Fluttered about my senses and my soul._279

I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied. Its difficulty enhanced the value of the pursuit. I began with no knowledge of the art. I did not know where to place my dark box, how to focus my sitter, and my first picture I effaced to my consternation by rubbing my hand over the filmy side of the glass. It was a portrait of a farmer of Freshwater, who, to my fancy, resembled Bollingbroke. The peasantry of our island are very handsome. From the men, the women, the maidens and the children I have had lovely subjects, as all the patrons of my photography know.

This farmer I paid half-a-crown an hour, and, after many half-crowns and many hours spent in experiments, I got my first picture, and this was the one I effaced when holding it triumphantly to dry.

---

279 These lines, also from "The Gardener’s Daughter" (ll.63-66), contain an error. For Tennyson’s original “winged seeds” Cameron has substituted “winged lies.” This was brought to my attention by Martin Meisel.
I turned my coal-house into my dark room, and a glazed fowl house I had given to my children became my glass house! The hens were liberated, I hope and believe not eaten. The profit of my boys upon new laid eggs was stopped, and all hands and hearts sympathised in my new labour, since the society of hens and chickens was soon changed for that of poets, prophets, painters and lovely maidens, who all in turn have immortalized the humble little farm erection.

Having succeeded with one farmer, I next tried two children; my son, Hardinge, being on his Oxford vacation, helped me in the difficulty of focusing. I was half-way through a beautiful picture when a splutter of laughter from one of the children lost me that picture, and less ambitious now, I took one child alone, appealing to her feelings and telling her of the waste of poor Mrs. Cameron’s chemicals and strength if she moved. The appeal had its effect, and I now produced a picture which I called "My First Success."

I was in a transport of delight. I ran all over the house to search for gifts for the child. I felt as if she entirely had made the picture. I printed, toned, fixed and framed it, and presented it to her father that same day -- size, 11 in. by 9 in.²⁸⁰

Sweet, sunny-haired little Annie! No later prize has effaced the memory of this joy, and now that this same Annie is 18, how much I long to meet her and try my master hand upon her.

Having thus made my start, I will not detain my readers with other details of small interest; I only had to work on and to reap a rich reward.

I believe that what my youngest boy, Henry Herschel, who is now himself a very remarkable photographer, told me is quite true--that my first successes in my out-of-focus pictures were a fluke. That is to say, that when focusing and coming to something which, to

²⁸⁰ These are the measurements of the glass plate negative. The final print measures five and a half by seven and a half inches Helmut Gernsheim, Julia Margaret Cameron, Her Life and Photographic Work (New York: Aperture, 1975) 188.
my eye, was very beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing on the lens to the more
definite focus which all other photographers insist upon.

I exhibited as early as May ’65, I sent some photographs to Scotland -- a head of
Henry Taylor, with the light illuminating the countenance in a way that cannot be described;
a Raphaelesque Madonna, called “La Madonna Aspettante.” These photographs still exist,
and I think they cannot be surpassed. They did not receive the prize. The picture that did
receive the prize, called “Brenda,” clearly proved to me that detail of table-cover, chair and
krinoline skirt were essential to the judges of the art, which was then in its infancy. Since
that miserable specimen, the author of “Brenda” has so greatly improved that I am
content to compete with him and content that those who value fidelity and manipulation
should find me still behind him. Artists, however, immediately crowned me with la
urels, and though “Fame” is pronounced “The last infirmity of noble minds,” I must confess that
when those whose judgment I revered have valued and praised my works, “my heart has
leapt up like a rainbow in the sky,” and I have renewed all my zeal.

The Photographic Society of London in their Journal would have dispirited me very
much had I not valued that criticism at its worth. It was unsparing and too manifestly

---

281 Gernsheim, Weaver, and Hamilton note that Cameron exhibited in May of 1864 in the Tenth Annual
Exhibition of the Photographic Society in London. The exhibition is reviewed in the Photographic Journal, August
15, 1864: 86-88.

282 Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901) is the “author” of “Brenda”. The photograph was described in the British
sitting reading - has again received a medal.”

283 Henry Peach Robinson criticized Cameron’s “out of focus” technique.

284 Artists admired her approach and the art critic Coventry Patmore wrote a favorable review.

The full quotations Cameron is alluding to here are from Milton and Wordsworth:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.
Lycidas

And:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
"My Heart Leaps Up” lines 1-2
unjust for me to attend to it. The more lenient and discerning judges gave me large space upon their walls which seemed to invite the irony and spleen of the printed notice.\textsuperscript{285}

To Germany I next sent my photographs. Berlin,\textsuperscript{286} the very home of photographic art, gave me the first year a bronze medal, the succeeding year a gold medal, and one English institution- -the Hartly Institution- -awarded me a silver medal, taking, I hope, a home interest in the success of one whose home was so near to Southampton.\textsuperscript{287}

Personal sympathy has helped me on very much. My husband from first to last has watched every picture with delight, and it is my daily habit to run to him with every glass upon which a fresh glory is newly stamped, and to listen to his enthusiastic applause. This habit of running into the dining-room with my wet pictures has stained such an immense quantity of table linen with nitrate of silver, indelible stains, that I should have been banished from any less indulgent household.

Our chief friend, Sir Henry Taylor,\textsuperscript{288} lent himself greatly to my early efforts. Regardless of the possible dread that sitting to my fancy might be making a fool of himself, he, with greatness which belongs to unselfish affection, consented to be in turn Friar Laurence with Juliet, Prospero with Miranda, Ahasuerus with Queen Esther, to hold my poker as his scepter, and do whatever I desired of him. With this great good friend was it true that so utterly

\textsuperscript{285} Cameron’s work was not reviewed favorably by the photographic press of the time.

\textsuperscript{286} Berlin International Photographic Exhibition, May-June 1865. Reviewed in The Photographic News, June 23, 1865:291-2. The exhibition of “the succeeding year: (1866) was not reviewed in British photographic journals.

\textsuperscript{287} The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Loans Exhibition, The Hartley Institute at Southampton, summer 1866. Reviewed in the local press (Hamilton 12).

\textsuperscript{288} Sir Henry Taylor (1800-1886) was a civil servant and a poet, the author of Philip Van Artevelde. Cameron called him “Philip.”
and not only were my pictures secured for me, but entirely out of the Prospero and Miranda picture sprang a marriage which has, I hope, cemented the welfare and well-being of a real King Cophetua who, in the Miranda, saw the prize which has proved a jewel in that monarch’s crown. The sight of the picture caused the resolve to be uttered which, after 18 months of constancy, was matured by personal knowledge, then fulfilled, producing one of the prettiest idylls of real life that can be conceived, and, which is of far more importance, a marriage of bliss with children worthy of being photographed, as their mother had been, for their beauty; but it must also be observed that the father was eminently handsome, with a head of the Greek type and fair ruddy Saxon complexion.

Another little maid of my own from early girlhood has been one of the most beautiful and constant of my models, and in every manner of form has her face been reproduced, yet never has it been felt that the grace of the fashion of it has perished. This last autumn her head illustrating the exquisite Maud—

There has fallen a splendid tear

From the passion flower at the gate.

---

289 The quotation to which Cameron seems to be referring here is:

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

Locksley Hall, line 33

290 This refers to the marriage, in August 1867, between Mary Ryan (d.1914), a poor Irish girl whom Cameron took to her home and raised, and a gentleman, Henry James Stedman Cotton (1845-1915), who pursued a successful career in India and was later knighted (Hamilton 14).

291 This is a reference to Mary Hillier (1847-1936), a Freshwater resident who became the Cameron’s maid and most frequently photographed model.

292 From Maud; A Monodrama, Part I, XXII,X: Cameron quotes lines 908-909 here.
is as pure and perfect in outline as were my Madonna studies ten years ago, with ten times added pathos in the expression. The very unusual attributes of her character and complexion of her mind, if I may so call it, deserve mention in due time, and are the wonder of those whose life is blended with ours as intimate friends of the house.

I have been cheered by some very precious letters on my photography, and having the permission of the writers, I will reproduce some of those which will have an interest for all.

An exceedingly kind man from Berlin displayed great zeal, for which I have ever felt grateful to him. Writing in a foreign language, he evidently consulted the dictionary which gives two or three meanings for each word, and in the choice between these two or three the result is very comical. I only wish that I was able to deal with all foreign tongues as felicitously-

Mr.___ announces to Mrs. Cameron that he received the first half, a Pound Note, and took the Photographies as Mrs. Cameron wishes. He will take the utmost sorrow** to place the pictures were good.

Mr.___ and the Comitie regret heavily***that it is now impossible to take the Portfolio the rooms are filled till the least winkle.**** The English Ambassade takes the greatest interest of the placement the Photographies of Mrs. Cameron and Mr. ___ sent his extra ordinarest respects to the celebrated and famous female photographs. ----Yours most obedient, etc.

---

Goldberg (1981, 185) and Gernsheim (1975, 188) suggest that Cameron is here referring to Dr. Wilhelm Hermann Vogel, Professor of Photography at the Institute of Technology (Technische Hochschule), Berlin, who was at the time Germany's leading writer on photography and editor of Photographische Mitteilungen. A letter from him regarding arrangements for the exhibition is published in The Photographic News, June 23, 1865:291-2 (Hamilton 14).

According to Gernsheim and Goldberg (op. cit.) this was the entrance fee to the exhibition.
The kindness and delicacy of this letter is self-evident and the mistakes are easily explained—

**Care— which was the word needed— is expressed by “Sorgen” as well as "Sorrow." We invert the sentence and we read— To have the pictures well placed where the light is good.

***Regret— Heavily, severely, seriously.

****Winkle— is corner in German.

The exceeding civility with which the letter closes is the courtesy of a German to a lady artist, and from first to last, Germany has done me honour and kindness until, to crown all my happy associations with that country, it has just fallen to my lot to have the privilege of photographing the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Germany and Prussia.

This German letter had a refinement which permits one to smile with the writer, not at the writer. Less sympathetic, however, is the laughter which some English letters elicit, of which I give one example—

Miss Lydia Louisa Summerhouse Donkins informs Mrs. Cameron that she wishes to sit to her for her photograph. Miss Lydia Louisa Summerhouse Donkins is a Carriage person, and, therefore, could assure Mrs. Cameron that she would arrive with her dress uncrumpled.

Should Miss Lydia Louisa Summerhouse Donkins be satisfied with her picture, Miss Lydia Louisa Summerhouse Donkins has a friend who is also a Carriage person who would also wish to have her likeness taken.
I answered Miss Lydia Louisa Summerhouse Donkins that Mrs. Cameron, not being a professional photographer, regretted she was not able to “take her likeness,” but that had Mrs. Cameron been able to do so she would have very much preferred having her dress crumpled.

A little art teaching seemed a kindness, but I have more than once regretted that I could not produce the likeness of this individual with her letter affixed thereto.

This was when I was at L.H.H., to which place I had moved my camera for the sake of taking the great Carlyle.

When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man.

The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer. Most devoutly was this feeling present to me when I photographed my illustrious and revered as well as beloved friend, Sir John Herschel. He was to me as a Teacher and High Priest.

From my earliest girlhood I had loved and honoured him, and it was after a friendship of 31 years’ duration that the high task of giving his portrait to the nation was allotted to me. He had corresponded with me when the art was in its first infancy in the days of Talbot-type and autotype. I was then residing in Calcutta, and scientific discoveries sent to that then benighted land were water to the parched lips of the starved, to say nothing of the blessing of friendship so faithfully evinced.

295 Little Holland House where Cameron’s sister Sara Prinsep held her salon for leading writers and other artists.

296 Like his father, the astronomer Sir William Herschel, John was also an astronomer and scientist who, in addition experimented with photography.

297 Hamilton(15) points out that “autotype” is an error: Cameron meant “daguerreotype,” as she wrote in a letter to Herschel on February 26, 1864 (Royal Society collection5-159).
When I returned to England the friendship was naturally renewed. I had already been made godmother to one of his daughters, and he consented to become godfather to my youngest son. A memorable day it was when my infant’s three sponsors stood before the font, not acting by proxy, but all moved by real affection to me and to my husband to come in person, and surely Poetry, Philosophy, and Beauty were never more fitly represented than when Sir John Herschel, Henry Taylor, and my own sister, Virginia Somers, were encircled round the little font of the Mortlake Church.

When I began to photograph I sent my first triumphs to this revered friend, and his hurrahs for my success I here give. The date is 25th September 1866--

My dear Mrs. Cameron---

This last batch of your photographs is indeed wonderful, and wonderful in two distinct lines of perfection. That head of the “Mountain Nymph, Sweet Liberty” (a little farouche and egaree, by the way, as if first let loose and half afraid that it was too good), is really a most astonishing piece of high relief. She is absolutely alive and thrusting out her head from the paper into the air. This is your own special style. The other of “Summer Days” is in the other manner--quite different, but very beautiful, and the grouping perfect. “Proserpine” is awful. If ever she was “herself the fairest flower” her “cropping” by “Gloomy Dis” has thrown the deep shadows of Hades in not only the colour, but the whole cast and expression of her features. “Christabel” is a little too indistinct to my mind, but a fine head. The large profile is admirable, and altogether you seem resolved to out-do yourself on every fresh effort.
This was encouragement eno’ for me to feel myself held worthy to take this noble head of my great Master myself, but three years I had to wait patiently and longingly before the opportunity could offer.298

Meanwhile I took another immortal head, that of Alfred Tennyson, and the result was that profile portrait which he himself designates as the “Dirty Monk.” It is a fit representation of Isaiah or of Jeremiah and Henry Taylor said the picture was as fine as Alfred Tennyson’s finest poem. The Laureate has since said of it that he likes it better than any photograph that has been taken of him except one by Mayall,299 that “except” speaks for itself. The comparison seems too comical. It is rather like comparing one of Madame Tussaud’s waxwork heads to one of Woolner’s ideal heroic busts. At this same time Mr. Watts gave me such encouragement that I felt as if I had wings to fly with.

Sources used in this transcription of the Annals:


298 1867, three years from the “first success” of Annie in 1864 (Gernsheim and Goldberg).

299 John Jabez Edwin Mayall (1810-1901), an American who settled in England and became a renowned portrait photographer (Hamilton 16).
Weaver, Mike. *Julia Margaret Cameron 1815-1879*. Exhibition Catalog, the Hansard Gallery.

Merlin and the Gleam

I.

O young Mariner,
You from the haven
Under the sea-cliff,
You that are watching
The gray Magician
With eyes of wonder,
I am Merlin,
And I am dying,
I am Merlin
Who follow The Gleam.

II.

Mighty the Wizard
Who found me at sunrise
Sleeping, and woke me
And learn’d me Magic!
Great the Master,
And sweet the Magic,
When over the valley,
In early summers,
Over the mountain,
On human faces,
And all around me,
Moving to melody,
Floated The Gleam.

III.

Once at the croak of a Raven who crost it,
A barbarous people,
Blind to the magic,
And deaf to the melody,
Snarl'd at and cursed me.
A demon vext me,
The light retreated,
The landskip darken'd,
The melody deaden'd,
The Master whisper'd
"Follow The Gleam."

IV.

Then to the melody,
Over a wilderness
Gliding, and glancing at
Elf of the woodland,
Gnome of the cavern,
Griffin and Giant,
And dancing of Fairies
In desolate hollows,
And wraiths of the mountain,
And rolling of dragons
By warble of water,
Or cataract music
Of falling torrents,
Flitted The Gleam.

V.

Down from the mountain
And over the level,
And streaming and shining on
Silent river,
Silvery willow,
Pasture and plowland,
Horses and oxen,
Innocent maidens,
Garrulous children,
Homestead and harvest,
Reaper and gleaner,
And rough-ruddy faces
Of lowly labour,
Slided The Gleam.--
VI.

Then, with a melody
Stronger and statelier,
Led me at length
To the city and palace
Of Arthur the king;
Touch’d at the golden
Cross of the churches,
Flash’d on the Tournament,
Flicker’d and bicker’d
From helmet to helmet,
And last on the forehead
Of Arthur the blameless
Rested The Gleam.

VII.

Clouds and darkness
Closed upon Camelot;
Arthur had vanish’d
I knew not whither,
The king who loved me,
And cannot die;
For out of the darkness
Silent and slowly
The Gleam, that had waned to a wintry glimmer
On icy fallow
And faded forest,
Drew to the valley
Named of the shadow,
And slowly brightening
Out of the glimmer,
And slowly moving again to a melody
Yearningly tender,
Fell on the shadow,
No longer a shadow,
But clothed with The Gleam.

VIII.

And broader and brighter
The Gleam flying onward,
Wed to the melody,
Sang thro’ the world;
And slower and fainter,
Old and weary,
But eager to follow,
I saw, whenever
In passing it glanced upon
Hamlet or city,
That under the Crosses
The dead man’s garden,
The mortal hillock,
Would break into blossom;
And so to the land’s
Last limit I came--
And can no longer,
But die rejoicing,
For thro’ the Magic
Of Him the Mighty,
Who taught me in childhood,
There on the border
Of boundless Ocean,
And all but in Heaven
Hovers The Gleam.

IX.

Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,
Not of the starlight!
O young Mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow The Gleam.

Ricks 3: 205
Appendix B

Additional Photographs
Fig. 63

William Holman Hunt:

“Isabella and the Pot of Basil”
Fig. 64

"Pre-Raphaelite Study"
Fig. 65

“Annie, my first success”
Fig. 66

Julia Cameron Norman
Fig. 67

Julia Margaret Cameron and Sons, 1875
Taken by Charles Lutwidge Dodson
Fig. 68

Julia Margaret Cameron, 1870

Taken by H.H.H. Cameron
Fig. 69

Sir John Frederick William Herschel

April 1869
Fig. 70

“The Whisper of the Muse”

G.F. Watts
Fig. 71

Lionel Tennyson as the Marquis de St. Cash
Fig. 72

"A Rembrandt"  Sir Henry Taylor
Fig. 73

"Mrs. Leslie Stephen" 1867

(Julia Jackson, Mrs. Herbert Duckworth)
Fig. 74

Thomas Carlyle 1867
Fig. 75

Anny Thackeray Ritchie 1867
Fig. 76

Balaclava: Roger Fenton
Fig. 77

“The Rosebud Garden of Girls”
Fig. 78

“Florence” (Florence Fisher) 1873
Fig. 79

Sir Henry Taylor
Fig. 80

A Soldier: Robert Baden-Powell
Fig. 81

“So like a shatter’d column lay the King”
Fig. 82

Daniel Maclise

Morte D'Arthur
Fig. 83

"Little Prince Alamayou of Abyssinia"
Fig. 84

"Prospero and Miranda"
Fig. 85

"Friar Lawrence and Juliet"
Fig. 86

"Ophelia"
Fig. 87

Sir Edward Coley Burne Jones

"King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid"
Fig. 88

"Sisters"
Fig. 89

Mary Hillier as "St. Agnes"
Fig. 90

Mary Hillier as “The Dream”
Fig. 91

Mary Hillier

"Call, I follow"
Fig. 92

Dimbola Lodge

Freshwater Bay, 1871
Fig. 93

“Despair”
Fig. 94

Ellen Terry:

"The South West Wind"
Fig. 95

Ellen Terry as "Sadness"