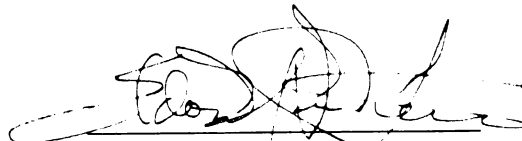


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PORTRAITS OF GREAT MEN AND BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

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JULIA MARGARET CAMERON AND THE ART OF THE PORTRAIT:
PORTRAITS OF GREAT MEN AND BEAUTIFUL WOMEN

By

Mary Therese Mulligan

A THESIS

Submitted to

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ABSTRACT

Julia Margaret Cameron and the Art of the Portrait

Portraits of Great Men and Beautiful Women

by

Mary Therese Mulligan

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence that the idealistic philosophical writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin had upon the photographic portraiture of the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. This paper examines the ways in which their views were translated into Cameron's portraits of great men and beautiful women.

The advancement of artistic portrait photographs was, in a large part, due to the enthusiasm and aspirations of Julia Margaret Cameron. By combining a romantic visual language with an expressive vision of light and form, Cameron attempted to produce portraits equal in importance to fine art painting. Her portrait photographs fall into two categories: first, portraits of great men, who represent the embodiment of of genius, and second, portraits of women, who symbolically represent ideal beauty. The resulting works reveal Cameron's interest in incorporating the heroic and moral philosophical ideas of Carlyle and Ruskin into photographic images.

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Introduction

Cameron and the Portrait

Julia Margaret Cameron is acknowledged as a key figure in the elevation of Victorian portrait photography from a commercial medium to a fine art. She opened up a new avenue of pictorial expression by combining a romantic visual language with an expressive vision of light and form. As a woman and an artist, Cameron crossed all barriers and boldly entered the world of the official Photographic Salons and the Royal Academy. The artistic and technical innovations of Cameron resulted from a lifelong principle: to render the relationship between the spiritual and physical elements of life symbolically. Her highly personalized portraits of great men and beautiful women explore this relationship.

Cameron was well known for her original approach to photographic portraiture. She sought to create portraits that were not merely a record of a subject's physical presence but rather a spiritual evocation of their being. The resulting works -soft focused and romantic images inspired by an idealistic aesthetic- occupy a unique place in Victorian photography. Cameron viewed her portraits not as ordinary studio portraits but as works of fine art. She wanted to translate the principles of fine portrait painting into the photographic medium. So like a portrait painter, Cameron recorded elements of physical fact about her model, but she also presented her subject as a work of art by creating a poetic composition of

light and shadow harmony. In her attempt to establish portrait photography as an art form, Cameron challenged conventional photographic attitudes and methods. Her expressive photographic style demanded a new and modern approach to portraiture, photographic techniques and pictorial form.

Cameron's photographic career began in 1863, at the age of 48, and lasted for seventeen years until her death in Ceylon in January of 1879. She reached the peak of her artistic development between 1867-1870. It was during this period that she photographed the majority of her portraits of great men and beautiful women. Cameron's ability to develop quickly as a photographer stems from her close association with influential Victorian writers, artists and photographers. When she began photographing in 1863, her artistic vision had already been conditioned by the idealistic teachings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin and the romantic interests of the portrait painter G.F. Watts, the Pre-Raphaelite artists and the photographer David Wynfield.

Throughout her career, Cameron considered herself an amateur photographer. This was a status the photographer favored because it meant that she was not bound to the academic traditions of the official Photography Society. As an amateur photographer, Cameron enjoyed complete control over her photographic work. She chose only those models that she felt best exemplified her concept of the heroic or the beautiful. Consequently, Cameron was assured that her portraits represented her philosophical ideals of moral and spiritual truth.

Cameron was just one of several amateur photographers who were influencing the course of Victorian portrait photography. In response to mass-produced commercial portraits, Cameron, along with Lewis Carroll and

Lady Hawarden, attempted to interject artistic standards in photographic portraiture. These amateur photographers believed it was their duty to beautify the photographic image. By translating the principles of fine portrait painting into photographic images, Cameron, Lewis and Hawarden sought to elevate photographic portraiture to a fine art form. They emphasized photographic and compositional devices that make artistic prints. Then, in order that their portraits had a true artistic and meaningful expression, these photographers captured on the photographic plate the beautiful and heroic character of life. In this way, Cameron and other amateur photographers introduced a new artistic approach to portrait photography that had its parallel in the fine portrait painting of the day.

The photographic process employed by Cameron was the collodion wet-plate negative process. Introduced by F. Scott Archer in 1851, the collodion process was a difficult and time-consuming procedure. The photographer would first hand-coat a piece of glass with iodized collodion, a mixture of guncotton and ether.¹ After sensitizing the plate with silver nitrate, the wet glass plate was exposed and immediately developed. This process allowed the photographer to attain "a high resolution of detail."² For Cameron, the ability to work with such a difficult process was seen as a great artistic and technical feat. In photography, as in painting of the day, the difficulty of execution of a work was viewed as a testament of artistic achievement. But many of the portraits of great men and beautiful women reveal the photographer's inexpert handling of the delicate and complicated steps of the collodion process. Often Cameron allowed spots, smudges and stains present in the glass negative, to remain in the final photographic image. Such defects

were usually due to uneven coating of the glass plate or shrinkage of the coating during the drying period. Perhaps these blemishes were seen by Cameron as evidence of the hard work she undertook to produce a unique photograph. Whatever the reason, Cameron's use of the collodion process points to her singlemindedness and her dedication to the photographic medium.

Bibliographical Literature on Julia Margaret Cameron

In this paper, I have investigated the influence that the idealistic teachings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin had upon the portrait photography of Julia Margaret Cameron. I found several sources that illustrate Cameron's close association with Carlyle and Ruskin. These sources include Helmut Gernsheim's authoritative biography of the photographer entitled Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work and Brian Hill's chronicle of the Cameron family, Julia Margaret Cameron: A Victorian Family Portrait. Gernsheim's book also helped me to gain a better perspective of the photographer's artistic techniques and methods. The 1974 manuscript Annals of My Glass House, letters and poems by Cameron underscore the artist's dominant trust in idealistic philosophy and in the arts. These compositions reveal Cameron's eagerness to produce artistic and poetic portraits in which the internal moral and spiritual character of a subject is externalized and fixed on a photographic plate.

In recent years, photographic historians have explored the poetic and heroic symbolism of Cameron's portraits of great men and beautiful women. Two books which provided insightful interpretations of the photographer's use of symbol and allegory are The Pre-Raphaelite Camera by Michael Barttram and Mike Weaver's Julia Margaret Cameron 1817-1879. Along with Graham Ovedon's Pre-Raphaelite Photography, these books also investigate

Graham Ovedon's Pre-Raphaelite Photography, these books also investigate the romantic interests and imagery that links the photography of Cameron to the art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

The development of artistic portrait photography during the Victorian era was influenced by contemporary philosophy. To understand the genesis of Cameron's own ideas about art, photography and symbolism, it is necessary to study the principles of the philosophical doctrine that greatly influenced her work. Cameron's portraits of great men and beautiful women reflect the romantic idealism and moral spiritualism of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. Among the sources that provide a knowledgeable study of the development and principles of romantic idealism are Dennis P. Grady's essay, Philosophy and Photography in the Nineteenth Century, The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin by Frederick W. Roe and George A. Cate's Carlyle and His Contemporaries.

The history of photography has become a popular subject and, along with it, there is a revival of interest in Cameron's portrait photography and her promotion of photography as a fine art. Her enthusiasm and ambition to raise the artistic standards of portrait photography revolutionized the photographic medium. Cameron's innovative approach to photographic technique and methods and her employment of poetic and heroic themes constituted a new and modern vision in photography. A vision that paralleled the romantic concerns and principles of the philosophical teachings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin and the art of G.F. Watts and the Pre-Raphaelites. Cameron's portraits of great men and beautiful women, which emphasized the importance of moral and spiritual values, influenced photographers in her own day. They also inspired a new generation of amateur and professional photographers to introduce a modern

idealism into late nineteenth and early twentieth century portrait photography.

Chapter One

The Formative Years

Julia Margaret Cameron, the daughter of James and Adeleine Pattie, was born in Calcutta, India in 1815. As the daughter of a British civil servant, she, as well as her six sisters, was sent at the age of five or six to be educated in Europe. Living in Paris with her grandmother, Mme. de L'Etang, Cameron was inhabited by curiosity and a desire to create. Perhaps the spirit of openness and freedom of expression that was found later in Cameron's own family home as well as her photography owed much to her childhood home in Paris.

In 1838, at the age of 23, Cameron married Charles Hay Cameron, a brilliant classical scholar and a lawyer, who was a member of the Council of Education for Bengal. As the wife of an influential Anglo-Indian official, Cameron was one of the leaders of Calcutta society. Her home was frequented by the greatest figures in government, science, art, music, and literature. But entertaining was just one aspect of Cameron's multifaceted life. She was a woman of boundless energy and generosity, raising six children and organizing relief funds for families starving during the Irish potato famine of 1846.

Throughout her life, Cameron was attracted to literature. She had an intellectual passion for romantic literature and poets. In 1847, she published a translation of the poem 'Leonore' by the German poet Gottfried

Burger. Her translation was accompanied by illustrations of D. Maclise, R.A.¹ When in 1848, Cameron and her family moved to England, she formed life long friendships with poets Henry Taylor and the Poet-Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson. By the mid-1850's, the Cameron home at East Sheen and later at Farrington in the Isle of Wight, was a meeting place for the intellectual giants of literature, music and art. On any given Sunday, one could meet Tennyson, Thackery, and Carlyle, the astronomer and photographer Sir John Herschel and several Pre-Raphaelite artists, including Thomas Woolner, Holman Hunt and Dante G. Rossetti. Cameron devoted herself and her time to her friends. In her own intellectual pursuits, she tried to emulate their ideas. The poem 'On a Portrait,' published in Macmillan's Magazine in 1876, reveals Cameron's interest in a romantic language that conveyed noble and moral ideals:

Oh, mystery of Beauty! Who can tell
 Thy mighty influence? Who can best descry
 How secret, swift, and subtle is the spell
 Wherein the music of thy voice doth lie?

Here we have eyes so full of fervent love,
 That but for lids behind which sorrow's touch
 Doth press and linger, one could almost prove
 That Earth had lover her favourite over much.

A mouth where silence seems to gather strength
 From lips so gently closed, that almost say,
 Ask not my story, lest you hear at length
 Of sorrows where sweet hope has lost its way.

And yet the head is borne so proudly high,
 The soft round cheek, so splendid with its bloom,
 True courage rises thro' the brilliant eye,
 And great resolve comes flashing thro' the gloom.

Oh, noble painter! more than genius goes
 To search the key-note of these melodies,
 To find the depths of all those tragic woes,
 Tune thy song right and paint rare harmonies.

Genius and love have each fulfilled their part,
 And both unite with force and equal grace,
 Whilst all that we love best in classic art
 Is stamped for ever on the immortal face.²

Cameron and her 'Divine Art'

In 1863, while her husband was in Ceylon visiting his coffee plantations, Cameron received a camera and a darkroom outfit from her daughter Julia and her son-in-law Charles Norman. "It may amuse you, Mother," remarked Julia, "to try to photograph during your solitude at Freshwater Bay."³ Little did Cameron's daughter realize that her gift would become her mother's major occupation. In her Annals of My Glasshouse, Cameron reflected that

"the gift from those I loved so tenderly added more and more impulse to my deep-seated love for the beautiful, and from the first moment I handled my lens with a tender ardor."⁴

Cameron approached photography with her usual enthusiasm and determination. She had found her purpose in life. "I longed to arrest," she wrote, "the beauty that came before me, and at length the longing was satisfied."⁵ Through photography, Cameron realized that she could create beauty and works of art, like her poet and artist friends.

From the beginning of her photographic career, Cameron was interested in portraiture. She had collected carte-de-visite portraits of her friends and had criticized the way in which these mass-produced pictures reflected little of the subject's personality. Now as a photographer, she aspired to produce portraits that had artistic as well as aesthetic merit. Cameron was a part of a romantic art movement that attempted to elevate the status of English portraiture.

In the early 1800's, academic authorities judged that religious and

historical paintings were more important than portrait painting. Portraiture, which had long been considered a forte of English painting, lost its popularity due to the advent of photography. Portrait painters could do little to stop the English craze for carte-de-visite portraits. Many painters became photographers and turned their studios into photographic portrait studios. The painter Holman Hunt noted that "many (painters) turned their steps towards photography and business connected therein, and thus found a much more tranquil career and oft-times ampler fortune."⁶ To counteract the commercialization of English portraiture, painters and photographers began to create 'artistic' portraits that revealed moral, heroic, and spiritual ideals.

In the mid-1800's, the idealistic writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin inspired artists, as well as politicians, to establish an official portrait gallery. The creation of the National Portrait Gallery reflected a new attitude in Victorian society for pictures of moral and noble heroes. The statesman Palmerston concluded that heroic portraits were an "incentive to mental exertion, to noble actions, to good conduct."⁷ The moral and heroic philosophy founded by Carlyle, and supported by Ruskin, ignited a romantic revolution in philosophical, political, literary and art circles. The need for Carlylean heroes inspired artists and photographers to produce portraits of the greatest intellectuals of the Victorian age. The romantic ideas of Cameron link her to the philosophical principles of Carlyle and Ruskin. Her portraits of famous men exemplify the heroic ideal.

The advancement of artistic portrait photography was, in large part, due to the enthusiasm and aspirations of a talented group of amateur photographers. This group included Cameron, Lewis Carroll and Lady

Hawarden. As amateurs, these photographers were not bound to the academic tradition of the official Photography Society. They approached photographic portraiture with a fresh romantic spirit and an eye for the 'Beautiful' in life and nature. In response to the low standards of commercial portrait photography, these photographers believed that it was their mission to beautify the photographic image. So, they turned their cameras on the picturesque beauty of women, children and nature. Inspired by John Ruskin's concept of Beauty, Cameron's portraits of beautiful women emphasize the importance of beauty and nature as the embodiment of an inner moral and spiritual ideal. Along with other amateur photographers, Cameron sought to raise the artistic standards of portrait photography by capturing the beautiful and heroic character of life.

In her photographic portraits, Cameron documented a unique segment of Victorian life. With her family and friends, she was a part of a Victorian social group that promoted the 'Beautiful Life.' At Little Holland House in Kensington, Sarah Prinsip (Cameron's sister) founded a 'salon' that celebrated the famous and the beautiful. Every Sunday afternoon "the wit of cynics, the dreams of the inspired and the thoughts of the profoundest thinkers of the age" were freely voiced.⁸ Beautiful women, dressed in simple free-flowing garments, were always in attendance. Little Holland House was a haven for men and women who pursued beauty in all its forms. And Cameron, with camera in hand, stood ready to record the 'Beautiful Life' at Little Holland House. She produced portraits that recorded not only beauty and genius but, more importantly, a way of life.

Little Holland House played a major role in the advancement of artistic portraiture in painting and photography. It provided a stimulating environment in which painters mixed with amateur and

professional photographers, freely exchanging artistic ideas. At Little Holland House Cameron came into contact with a group of romantic artists, who viewed that English portraiture was without moral or spiritual values. Known as the Pre-Raphaelites, this group believed that portraiture should emphasize the inner character of mankind. As an admirer of the Pre-Raphaelites, Cameron aimed to adapt their modern ideal of portraiture into her own photographic images. Like them, she sought to combine factual appearance with spiritual insight: thus, she began to record in 1863 portraits of the famous and the beautiful.

At Little Holland House, Cameron also met her artistic mentor, G.F. Watts, the greatest portraitist of the Victorian age. Although not a member of the Pre-Raphaelite group, Watts was a romantic artist, who shared with the Pre-Raphaelites an interest in the modern ideal of artistic portraiture. In 1860, he began painting the portraits of the greatest figures in Victorian society. Cameron's portraits of famous men emulate Watt's own paintings. She adapted many of her mentor's compositional elements, such as posing and lighting devices, into her photographic portraits. Calling him her 'divine artist,' Cameron depended on Watts for criticism and support. That he approved of Cameron's artistic handling of the photographic image is reflected in his statement—"I wish I could paint such a picture as this!"⁹

Cameron's style and approach to photographic portraiture was greatly influenced by the portrait paintings of Watts and the Pre-Raphaelites, in particular A. Hughes and Dante G. Rossetti. The only photographer whom Cameron believed shared her artistic aspirations was David Wilkie Wynfield. He believed, as Cameron did, that 'artistic' portraiture could be achieved by concentrating on a subject's head and face and employing a

soft 'painterly' focus. Like these artists, Cameron approached her work with a romantic and modern vision. Her views of photographic aesthetics and purpose were informed by the idealistic teaching of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. Cameron's contribution to portrait photography revolutionized the medium and elevated the portrait to an art form.

Cameron and her Photographic Method

In her search for heroic character and for beauty, Cameron became part of the emotional and psychological world of her subject. She never stood back from her sitter. Her concern for artistic effect compelled her to photograph close-up portraits, bringing the subject right up to the picture plane. This innovative approach is the hallmark of Cameron's portraits. The photographer looked for simplified, telling gestures that would visually convey the subject's personality. She gave special emphasis to the positioning of the hands and head. The picturesque arrangement of these features combined to produce an eloquent effect of dignity and human feeling. Occasionally, Cameron would use accessories to accentuate a pose or to give a poetic accent to the composition. Like a fine portrait painter, Cameron revealed the inner character and beauty of her subject by emphasizing human expression and emotion.

Characteristic of Cameron's portraits was the innovative treatment of light and focus. In the portraits of famous men, she employed a strong direct light to stress the emotional and psychological nature of her subject. Pictorially, this type of lighting effect accentuated the dramatic relationship between masses of light and dark. However, in the portraits of beautiful women, the light is more even and graduated. While less dramatic, the soft light found in these works suggests a poetic and serene atmosphere. Throughout her portrait photography, Cameron employed

a soft, blurry focus for artistic effect. Her use of a soft focus caused a controversy within photographic circles. Many photographers, who belonged to the 'hard-edged' school of photography, believed that a soft focus was not a legitimate method. But for Cameron, this type of focus accentuated the picturesque quality of her portraits. It allowed her to create large simplified forms and open planes within the pictorial frame. More importantly, Cameron's use of a soft focus reveals an instinctual approach to photography. She was more interested in depicting ideas and emotions than facts and an objective view of reality.

In her portrait photography, Cameron recorded the expressive personality of her subject. By her innovative treatment of pose, light and focus, she endeavored to create a beautiful and artistic photographic image. It is this combination of elements, and her own emotional and psychological interpretation, that makes Cameron's portraits so unique. Even after her death in 1879, her work continued to influence the course of Victorian photography. It inspired photographers to pursue beauty and to deal with moral and spiritual themes. In the next chapter, we will examine the idealistic teaching of Carlyle and Ruskin and see the way in which their writings influenced Cameron's own ideas about art and portrait photography.

Chapter Two

The Influence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin on the Photographic Work of Julia Margaret Cameron

The development of photography in 19th century Great Britain was greatly influenced by contemporary philosophy. Two schools of thought, Metaphysical Idealism and Positivism, provided an intellectual climate that influenced divergent views of photographic theory and purpose. The Victorian Age in England offered the dialectic environment promoted by these two philosophical schools. On the one hand, Victorians prized the romantic qualities of subjective experience; while on the other, they sought to understand reality and human experience through the predictability of objective scientific inquiry.

If we can discover how Julia Margaret Cameron came to depend upon the philosophical ideas of Metaphysical Idealism and Positivism, we will better understand the genesis of her own ideas about art and photography. We will, first, survey the principles and development of both philosophical systems; second, consider the influence that the writings of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin had upon Cameron's photography; and, finally, examine the ways in which their views were translated into Cameron's photographic images.

The Philosophical Principles of Metaphysical Idealism and Positivism

Metaphysical Idealism contends "that within natural human experience one can find the clue to the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, and this clue is revealed through traits which distinguish man as a spiritual being.¹ This definition emphasizes the idea that knowledge of ultimate reality can only be realized through the human traits of reason and intuition. Thus, sense impressions do not reveal the ultimate reality since man is imbued with reason and intuition and is not simply a physical entity but a spiritual being.

Metaphysical Idealism was, in part, derived from the philosophical writings of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which were called German Idealism, the dominant philosophical views of early 19th century Europe. Hegel sought to incorporate every discipline and subject into a universal world-view, which is revealed in the following passage:

"(Hegel) developed a dialectical scheme (of thought) that repeatedly swung from thesis to antithesis and back again to a higher and richer synthesis; one of the great modern creators of a philosophical system whose thought influenced the development of Existentialism, Marxism, Positivism and Analytical philosophy. . . (he) was deeply impressed with Kant's philosophy. . . (but) convinced that the limitations placed on reason by Kant were unjustified, he began to work out his phenomenology of mind. . . . (By 1807 he had formulated his position that) the human mind has risen from mere consciousness, through self-consciousness, reason, spirit and religion, to absolute knowledge. . . . the keynote of his teaching was to present the entire universe as a systematic whole. . . . (The German Idealism which followed) was proposed as a unitary solution to all the problems of philosophy. . . . Hegelianism thus focuses upon history and logic, a history in which it sees that 'the rational is real' and a logic in which it sees that 'the truth is the whole'."²

While Hegel's German Idealism assumed that absolute knowledge was revealed to man by reason and intuition, it also embraced science as a dependent

and supportive aspect of its philosophical system.

Early 19th century scholars and writers, whose work in literature, ethics and aesthetics can be associated with Hegel's idealistic vision of absolute reality, include Goethe and Fichte in Germany and Coleridge in England. They, like Hegel, viewed the interdependence of life, growth and experience as particularly important to human understanding. To the British writers and philosophers who emerged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century – Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin – the German Metaphysical Idealism of Goethe, Fichte and Coleridge became a touchstone for their own brand of Metaphysical Idealism.

Although German or Metaphysical Idealism was the academic philosophy in early 19th Century Europe, it was not without opposition. By mid-century the progress of science and the acceptance of scientific inquiry was beginning to shake the foundations of academic idealism. An antithesis to Metaphysical Idealism emerged, known as Positivism, a movement that also affected philosophy and science, and society as a while. Dennis P. Grady shows, in Philosophy and Photography in the Nineteenth Century, that philosophical tenets of positivism developed in three stages:

"From 1830 to 1860 the new ideas were being formulated – in France, the Positivism of Comte; in England, the new empiricism of John Stuart Mills; and in Germany, the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels. Between 1860 and 1880 the general trend of positivism became the dominant philosophy of Europe. Finally, from 1880 through the end of the century there began the questioning of positivism as the sole method of inquiry and as a completely tenable world-view."³

Positivism is a philosophical system that was opposed to Metaphysical Idealism. Positivism rejects metaphysics as relying too heavily on the

uncertainty of subjective experience. Instead, it assumed that certainty derived from scientific inquiry; it contends that reality has no ultimate nature, but is merely that which we perceive. Positivism flourished in the nineteenth century because of widespread belief in the importance and predictability of science which promoted the factual and the real rather than the subjective and ideal.

The emergence of photography in the second quarter of the nineteenth century tended to support a positivistic view of the world. It was assumed, for example, that the photograph was scientific evidence or a record of the real world. By virtue of its predictable mechanical capabilities, the camera appeared to confirm the validity of sense impressions. While the positivistic approach dominated photographic expression in the nineteenth century, a number of photographers, including Julia M. Cameron, sought to incorporate subjective, personal values into the experiential truth of the photograph. These photographers did not wish to merely describe the outward appearance of the world so they looked to Metaphysical Idealism for romantic and subjective views that could help obtain different photographic images.

The Positivist movement was founded in France by Auguste Comte, who, in 1830, published his revolutionary six-volume work: Course of Positive Philosophy. The study of the evolution of ideas and man's development of a correct method for ascertaining truth was, in Comte's mind, the major aim of philosophy. He promoted a positive-scientific system which disallows absolute principles or knowledge and renounces all speculations of mythology and metaphysics: a divine being, subjective reasoning and an ultimate reality. Instead, Positivism concerns itself with actual objects and social themes - the improvement of man's social condition in life.

Comte's study of science and human relationships is perhaps the most important aspect of his philosophy. He was the founder of sociology. Man's fundamental sociability, in Comte's judgment, reveals itself in human attainments - economic, political, moral, religious, artistic and scientific. Furthermore, Comte believed that men must be socially conscious. Their lives must be full and significant for the betterment of not just their immediate community, but society as a whole. This societal responsibility became the driving spirit of positivistic philosophy.

This new social awareness had a major impact on artists and photographers in France. A liberalizing spirit, fueled by the French Revolution of 1848, found its expression in the Realist paintings of Courbet and Manet. Realist photographers, including Charles Negre, who photographed medical hospitals and asylums, and the portraitist Nadar, documented places and people involved with social progress. The work of Negre and Nadar reveal a primary tenet of realism: that pictorial objectivity was verifiable truth. While such a positivistic revolutionary spirit was a driving force of the Realist movement, other artists and photographers clung to the spiritual and subjective ideals of Metaphysical Idealism. This is particularly true of many photographers, who associated their works with the kinds of painting exhibited in the official academies and salons. The development of divergent views of photographic theory and intent can be readily understood. Photographers wanted their works to be accepted as fine art, so they demonstrated in their photographs the same spiritual and romantic qualities found in popular paintings. Artists and photographers were divided between Positivism and Metaphysical Idealism: was Truth attained through empirical sense impressions of the former or through subjective and spiritual experiences of the latter?

The dichotomy of artistic intent that developed in the art community thus can be attributed to the opposing views of Positivism and Metaphysical Idealism. Positivism reflected everything revolutionary to the established authority in France. Both government and the official academy found themselves in a precarious position for they relied on Metaphysical Idealism as their philosophic base. This led to controversies whereby authorities of all kinds were constantly under attack. It seemed inevitable, then, that the two attitudes of photographic intent that emerged in the nineteenth century reflected the social and cultural divisions brought about by two philosophies.

This difference of philosophical views did not confine itself just to France but was experienced by England as well. There philosophical argument centered around the moral and social values of the machine age in Victorian life. The champion of the positivistic cause was John Stuart Mill through his materialistic doctrine of Utilitarianism. Mill's opponents were the influential Victorian historian, Thomas Carlyle, and his disciple, John Ruskin. The moral and social doctrines of Mill, Carlyle and Ruskin were to profoundly affect every facet of British culture.

In Britain, the principal philosophical movement in the early part of the nineteenth century was Liberal Empiricism, or, as it was then known, Utilitarianism. The primary task of this new movement was the practical application of moral and social reforms. Influenced by his philosopher father James Mill, John Stuart Mill developed a doctrine of materialistic principles. This doctrine, inspired by Liberal Empiricism, demanded a re-evaluation of another philosophical method - namely, Metaphysical Idealism. Although Mill did not regard himself as a disciple of Auguste

Comte, his philosophical approach was indebted to positivistic theory. Mill, like all positivists, rejected all forms of metaphysics. He promoted the positivistic idea that knowledge is ascertained by verifiable data and the predictable correlation of experience, not any absolute realities. In his autobiography, Mill defines his renouncement of anything metaphysical:

"The German, or a-priori view of human knowledge. . .is likely for sometime longer. . .to predominate among those who occupy themselves with such inquiries, both here and on the Continent. But the system of Logic supplies what was much wanted, a text-book of the opposite doctrine - that which derives all knowledge from experience. . . The notion that truths external to the mind may be known to intuition or consciousness, interdependently of observation and experience is. . . the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institution."⁴

The most significant aspect of Mill's utilitarianism was his ethical view and its application to political and social problems. Influenced by the philosophical writings of Jeremy Bentham, Mill's theory of ethics agreed with a fundamental idea of Bentham's social philosophy - "the greatest happiness of the greatest number."⁵ However, Mill's ethics led him beyond the secular utilitarianism of Bentham; Mill proposed that it is the happiness of others - the "Good" - which is the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people. This social view relied on the qualitative nature of intelligence to discern the value of pleasures. It is his application of ethical principles to social problems which instigated far-reaching reforms in British society, most notably, in the parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832. Mill fought for the political reform of government to safeguard the welfare of its people. For this, he also led the fight for political and social rights of women.

The Philosophical Idealism of Thomas Carlyle

A formidable opponent to Mill and his message was Thomas Carlyle and his romantic idealism. Inspired by German philosophy and literature, Carlyle renounced the 'soulless' philosophy of Utilitarianism. He believed that Mill's approach to ethics was materialistic which was weakened by omitting the spiritual values and creative vision of man. Although not a trained philosopher, Carlyle had composed a philosophy of life, which was incorporated into his work as writer and historian. With Samuel Coleridge, he introduced to British culture the principles of German Metaphysical Idealism. Born in Scotland in 1795, Carlyle became prominent in the late 1830's as the prophet of moral spiritualism. With prophetic fervor he attacked materialism and the value of the machine age in Britain. Carlyle's views influenced British society and culture in the nineteenth century and were recognized abroad by the German writer, Goethe, "as a new moral force."⁶

Carlyle championed the absolute reality of the Spirit against Utilitarianism. He rejected the idea that man and nature were only physical matter. Utilitarianism, in Carlyle's mind, was concerned with discerning man and nature's material characteristics rather than revealing their moral and spiritual attributes. He believed that the outward appearances of matter were just the less important trappings which clothed the inner spirit. This view is one element of his "philosophy of clothing" found in the book, Sartor Resartus.⁷ Carlyle advocated stripping away the surface of things in order to expose the absolute reality of the Spirit:

" . . . a world of inner Reality or Truth and outer Semblance or Untruth. The great heart of the Universe is True and Eternal

because it is Divine; the audible,⁸ visible and tangible is Trivial, False and Temporary. . ."

The key idea here is that Reality, Truth and the Divine constitute a universal 'fact' that lies at the very center of nature and mankind. This view, in part, owes its genesis to an idealistic concept expounded by the German metaphysical writer, Fichte, who characterized it as: "The Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the Bottom of Appearance. . ."

In his book, On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, published in 1841, Carlyle proposed that certain men of genius represent Truth and the Divine on Earth. He called these great men Heroes, who had the ability to perceive the spiritual world of Reality. Their actions and achievements were symbolic of God and his will. Carlyle defined the ideal nature of the hero as:

" . . . he who lives in the inward sphere of things, in the True, Divine and Eternal, which exists always unseen to most, under the Temporary, Trivial: his being is in that; he declares that abroad, by act or speech as it may be, in declaring himself abroad. His life. . .¹⁰ is a piece of the everlasting heart of Nature herself. . ."

Carlyle thought that history and human progress were shaped by the moral vision of heroes who helped to achieve the moral and social values of Victorian life and culture.

Carlyle's most important hero was the Literary Man. He believed that writers and poets possessed an 'inspired' genius for originality from their study and seeking of Truth and Divine Idea. The Literary Hero was viewed as a visionary and a prophet who, by virtue of his moral vision, was able to penetrate the material trappings of nature. In service to the common man, the Literary Hero offered guidance and inspiration and his

achievements believed to be visible examples of God's will working through man.

The moral and heroic philosophy founded by Carlyle thus offered an alternative to the materialistic ideas promoted by Mill. Carlyle ignited a romantic revolt in political, philosophical, literary and artistic circles. To many Victorian writers and artists, Carlyle's theories represented a valuable revival of past ideals, spiritual ideals that could be incorporated into a modern secular society. This view was held by many thinkers who sought a renewal of religious faith and art of the past and found themselves inclined toward a modern idealism.

The photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, was one of a number of artists who was influenced by Carlyle's moral and heroic philosophy. Both Cameron and Carlyle were members of an intellectual and aristocratic salon in Kensington, formed by Cameron's sister, Sarah Prinsep. Years of friendship bound the photographer to Carlyle. The two corresponded frequently, even about items of their everyday life as shown in this excerpt from a letter sent by Carlyle in 1858, while working on a biography of Frederick the Great:

"I work all day and all days, riding abroad a little in the dusk like a distracted ghost, trying if I can keep alive till the thing gets done, and gloomily returning to my den again. If I can live about a year at this rate I hope to be free, and for the rest of my life, whatever that may amount to."¹¹

Inspired by the historian's theory of the Hero, Cameron produced a series of images consisting of portraits of famous men. Critics have praised these portraits as her most important work. These images are romantic evocations of the creative nature of great men. Like Carlyle, Cameron viewed the man of letters as a true representative of heroic and

moral ideals. Literary figures dominate her portrait work and included Sir Alfred Tennyson (the Victorian Poet Laureate), Robert Browning, Sir Henry Taylor and Thomas Carlyle himself. The portraits of these men characterize a heroic ideal. In an 1874 autobiographical manuscript, Cameron notes that her portraits epitomize a romantic spirit:

"When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavored 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."¹²

Cameron views her role as a photographer as similar to that of a Carlylean Hero. She is an artist, a visionary who, like the literary hero, looks beneath appearances into the inner world of the Divine. The camera enables Cameron to combine the real with the ideal. Thus photography, in the hands of an artist, becomes a method of unique self-expression, creating works of fine art. In the next chapter, we will examine more specifically the way in which the portraits of famous men reflect Carlyle's theory of the heroic.

The romantic interests of Cameron link her to the development of a reactionary art movement called Pre-Raphaelitism. The Brotherhood of Pre-Raphaelites, formed in 1848, viewed that art and society in the Victorian age as being without moral or spiritual values. Like Cameron, they wanted to establish a new modern idealism by incorporating realistic art techniques and romantic subject matter. The Pre-Raphaelites attacked what they thought of as the time-worn artistic and aesthetic conventions promoted by the Royal Academy. Cameron also criticized the work of contemporary photographers who mass-produced carte-de-visite portraits

which reflected little of the subject's personality.

In his Edinburgh Lectures, John Ruskin defines a fundamental principle of Pre-Raphaelite art:

"Pre-Raphaelitism has but one principle, that of absolute, uncompromising truth in all that it does, obtained by working everything, down to the most minute detail, from nature, and from nature only."¹³

This idea of working directly from nature is found in Cameron's own photographic method. She insisted upon purity in her work, even to the extreme of never retouching or enlarging her images. Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelites shared many of the same attitudes and ideals. Graham Ovenden, in the book Pre-Raphaelite Photography, compares Cameron's photographs to the paintings of Rossetti and Hughes.¹⁴ An interest in romantic expression, subject matter, and beauty is noted by Ovenden to be a common theme. Cameron personally knew many of the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers who were active in her sister's intellectual salon. Pre-Raphaelite artists such as W. Holman Hunt and Thomas Woolner were photographed in her series on great men.

Indeed, many nineteenth century critics suggested that the Pre-Raphaelites derived their realistic painting method from photography. One critic writing in The Journal of the Royal Photographic Society stated:

"Pre-Raphaelitism owes much to photography, or may even spring from it, though its disciples would not willingly admit as much. Post-photography might probably more accurately describe this style of art than Pre-Raphaelitism."¹⁵

Though it is well-documented that many Pre-Raphaelites used the photograph as a compositional aid, the belief of many nineteenth century writers that the movement derived from photography is a gross misjudgment. Such a view

denies the unique character and creative vision of Pre-Raphaelite art. We can be more certain that painting and photography were influenced by the same elements: (1) heroic literature of the past as well as the work of contemporaries – Tennyson, Keats, Shelley, (2) art of the past, and (3) the teachings of Carlyle and Ruskin. Never before in the history of art have the ambitions and attitudes of painting, photography and literature been so interdependent on each other. Consequently, this similarity of interest decisively changed the course of modern art.

The Pre-Raphaelites regarded Carlyle as one of their heroes. W. Holman Hunt, a founding member of the Brotherhood, wrote of his admiration of Carlyle in the form of hero-worship:

"Living in Chelsea, I was near to the house of a philosopher who had from his genius pure and simple won worship of such degree that it is treason at the time I write of to limit the adoration offered at his shrine."¹⁶

The painting, Work, (Figure 1), by Ford Maddox Brown provides an example of the direct influence of Carlyle's teachings. In this symbolic picture, Brown depicts work in all its forms. He also includes a full-length portraits of Carlyle and the writer F.D. Maurice surveying the activity of workmen. Brown, like Carlyle, believed that productive activity or work should reflect the dignity and expression of the individual person. (Interestingly, Brown's portrait of Carlyle is based on an 1858 photograph, since the artist had trouble persuading the historian to pose for the painting.)

The Aesthetic and Artistic Ideas of John Ruskin

Besides Carlyle, another scholar, John Ruskin, had a powerful influence on the work of Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelites. By 1850, Ruskin



Figure 1

Ford Maddox Brown. Work. 1852-65.

became the foremost commentator on Art. He also championed the romantic ideals of Pre-Raphaelitism and his books on interpretations of art, criticisms of society and a moral system of aesthetics shaped artistic theory and purpose. As a follower of Carlyle, John Ruskin promoted the idea that man has a vital, invisible, and spiritual essence. In 1856, he expressed his admiration for Carlyle in the third volume of Modern

Painters:

"Most of all to Carlyle, whom I read constantly that, without willfully setting myself to imitate him, I find myself practically falling in his modes of expression."¹⁷

Like Carlyle, Ruskin believed that modern society was without moral ideals. He renounced materialism and modern science, especially Darwinism. Instead, Ruskin had an unwavering belief that art, history and life consisted of fundamental "facts" – Truth, Beauty, and Spirit. In his books and lectures, he prompted artists to look to the past for aesthetic, moral and social ideals. Both Ruskin and Carlyle recommended a revolutionary doctrine of idealistic values to transform attitudes, as well as the reality of Victorian life.

As an art critic and theoretician, Ruskin offered this piece of advice to artists:

"Go to nature in all singleness of heart, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing scorning nothing."¹⁸

To the Pre-Raphaelites, this statement reinforced their desire to paint realistically, even to the most minute detail and color. But it was photographers, like Cameron, who took this statement as justification of the artistic merit of the photographic image. For what was a better

instrument than the camera to record all the reality and nuances of nature.

Julia Margaret Cameron ardently supported Ruskin's teaching as well as Carlyle's. In her work, she sought to illustrate Ruskin's four aesthetic principles: Truth, Beauty, Nature, and Imagination. Her Ruskinite concerns are fully realized in her treatment of portraits of beautiful women. In an 1864 letter to Sir John Herschel, Ruskin's influence is revealed as Cameron characterizes her photographic efforts:

"My aspirations are to ennoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and the ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty."¹

Cameron and Ruskin both actively participated in the Sunday Salon at Sarah Prinsep's house - Little Holland House. Cameron was not successful in photographing the critic because he abhorred portrait sittings. Ruskin was skeptical about photography as an artistic medium; he viewed the camera as an instrument of documentation or as a compositional aid. But to photographers like Cameron, who associated their works with Fine Art, Ruskin's concepts of Truth, Nature, Beauty, and Imagination seemed to support them.

Although Cameron recorded faithfully the factual appearance of her subject, she, more importantly, tried to externalize the spiritual and moral nature of a person. This synthesis of the real and ideal is another hallmark of Cameron's photographs. By illustrating a subject's spiritual and moral character, the photographer revealed a fundamental Truth of human nature. Her poetic photographs of beautiful women with their long hair hanging loose, posed against a hedge or among flowers seem to express

some innate spirituality. These photographs emphasize the importance of beauty as the embodiment of an inner ideal. Cameron viewed beauty as a quality closely associated with nature and truth. Like Ruskin, she perceived that beauty was a symbol of God and His will in the visible world. In her portraits of women, their beauty is a reflection of what is true and divine, which seemed to embody Ruskin's concept of Beauty. In The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin, Frederick Roe defines Ruskin's theory of Beauty as:

"a special kind of pleasure communicated by man from the outer world, perceived first by physical signs then by the moral sense, or heart."²⁰

Thus this perception of beauty was held to be an important relationship to a person's moral and spiritual nature. To produce a photograph in which the internal is made external, Cameron exercised a creative process based on personal feeling, intuition and experience. This process is what Ruskin referred to as Imagination. Cameron's imaginative use of her camera allowed her to look beneath the surface of things. For her, imagination as a creative process was part of a criterion of artistic and aesthetic experience for perceiving the truths of human nature. Ruskin's four aesthetic principles of Truth, Nature, Beauty and Imagination represented to Cameron a practical doctrine that was applicable to photographic images.

Cameron's portraits of women and great men reflect the idealistic teachings of Ruskin and Carlyle. Their doctrines influenced the photographer to infuse her pictorial style with a romantic and an expressive spirit. She created images that were not merely a record of a subject's physical presence but rather was a spiritual evocation of their

inner being.

Chapter Three

Portraits of Great Men – The Image of the Heroic

Man is the sun of the world; more than the real sun. The force of his wonderful heart is the only light and heat worth gauge or measure. Where he is are the tropics: where he is not, is the ice world.¹

–John Ruskin

Julia Margaret Cameron's portraits of famous men explore the spiritual and creative forces of life. The portraits are not merely a photographic record of the likeness of a subject. Primarily, they serve as a visual impression of a subject's heroic and spiritual character. As discussed in the previous chapter, the aesthetic ideals of Cameron were informed by the philosophical doctrines of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. However, her persuasive photographic style is indebted to the artistic teachings of her mentor, George Frederick Watts, the photographer David Wilkie Wynfield and the physiognomic theories of John Casper Lavater. In this chapter we will examine the aesthetic and formal elements found in the photographic portraits of Cameron which were influenced by contemporary artists and writers.

Julia Margaret Cameron reached the peak of her artistic development between 1867–1870. It was during this period that she photographed the majority of her portraits of famous men, as well as beautiful women. Cameron's innovative portrait photography gave, in part, impetus to the revival of portraiture in Victorian art. She was one of a handful of

photographers, who in association with painters, were trying to elevate portraiture from banal representations to the level of grand and immortal characterizations. Her fervor to capture on a photographic plate the greatest intellectuals of the Victorian age is nothing less than an act of worship. The result are images that are "prayers to heroes."²

As a pioneer of a new type of photographic portraiture, Cameron developed a special working relationship with her subject. She never kept her distance from the sitter either physically or emotionally. In the portraits of famous men, the subject is not placed in the middle distance. Instead, the camera is focused on the subject's head so that it fills the entire picture frame. This close-up approach to portraiture is the hallmark of Cameron's work. By focusing on the head, the photographer believed she could capture the intellectual and creative spirit of her subject. Often the head is shown full-frontal to reveal all the characteristics of its physiognomy. Close-up photography was truly innovative for it contradicted the conventions of portraiture espoused by the Royal Academy. Portraiture, to Cameron's mind, was dictated by one's own imaginative inventiveness. In this way, the photographer became part of the emotional and psychological world of her subject.

The famous men Cameron chose to photograph all exemplified the characteristics of the Carlylean hero. The close-up method of portraiture that she employed served to illustrate her ideas of the heroic ideal. This can be noted in Cameron's powerful and heroic portrait of her philosophical mentor Thomas Carlyle (Figure 2). Produced in the summer of 1867, this picture is one of two photographs taken of the historian. The words "From Life" have been inscribed by Cameron on the mount of the picture.³ This inscription attests to the photographer's predilection to



Figure 2

J.M. Cameron. Thomas Carlyle. 1867

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photograph directly from life, without manipulation or retouching. In this way, Cameron insured an accurate and truthful portrait of her subject. The photograph depicts a foreground space filled with a maximum of form - the head of Carlyle. The individual features of his face - forehead, cheeks, nose and beard - are revealed as they emerge from a dark and mysterious background. Like an apparition, the image of Carlyle pushes right up to the picture's edge and towards the viewer. In the most uncompromising of poses, the head of Carlyle is turned full face. By concentrating on the human face, Cameron aspired to see beneath the physical presence of her subject and record his inner character and creative spirit.

The portrait of Carlyle is direct and without any affectation. The camera is focused on the most important part of the human face - the eyes. Then, as today, the eyes were considered a window on the soul. This central area is that most defined part of the photograph. Other features, such as the hair, mouth, and beard, recede into the dark background. These features appear blurry and almost indistinguishable from each other. There is a sacrifice of detail in this work for the overall statement of dramatic effect.

Critics have questioned whether Cameron intentionally manipulated the lens of her camera to attain a soft or differential focus. Cameron once remarked that "when focusing and coming to something beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing on the lens to the more definite focus which all photographers insisted on."⁴ But the soft focus found in Cameron's portrait of Carlyle can, in part, be attributed to her lack of knowledge of photographic equipment. Helmut Gernsheim, in his biography of Cameron, suggests that the photographer's use of a long focal length Rapid

Rectilinear lens produced a distortion in the photographic image.⁵

Cameron would place the camera lens at a distance of a couple of feet from the sitter. This was done so that the image of the sitter would cover the entire length of the photographic plate, which measured 15"x12".

Consequently, the depth of field in the final photograph is distorted; the center of the photograph is defined and in focus, while the surrounding areas are soft and blurry.⁶ The amount of exposure time also contributed to the soft focus found in many of Cameron's photographs. Setting the camera lens at full aperture, the photographer would take exposures that lasted from three to seven minutes. Often she would begin an exposure before first focusing the lens. It was inevitable, then, that any movement by the sitter would be recorded in the final image. Carlyle referred to the time he endured during her sitting as an "inferno".⁷ Much of the fuzziness in the photograph of Carlyle is due to movement.

In the Carlyle portrait, as well as in others, the soft focus represents Cameron's instinctual approach to photography. A soft focus enabled her to achieve an artistic and 'painterly' presentation. Cameron's son Henry, a professional photographer, wrote of his mother's use of a soft focus:

"It is a mistake to suppose that my mother deliberately aimed at producing work slightly out of focus. What was looked for by her was to produce an artistic result, no matter by what means. She always acted according to her instinct; if the image of her sitter look stronger and more characteristic out of focus, she reproduced it; but if she found that perfect clearness was desirable, she equally attained it."⁸

In the Carlyle portrait, the facial features of the historian are suggested by indefinite surfaces. The harsh contours of the head melt away revealing a smoothness and a fluidity of forms. The play of light

across the rhythmic forms conveys an impression of living motion. Through dramatic emphasis and focal distortions, Cameron's expressive method has the power of suggestion. The spiritual and creative nature of Carlyle is implied as the head emerges from a dark and mysterious environment. Cameron's use of a soft or differential focus is a visual expression of the photographer's own emotion and her desire to record the inner spirit of Carlyle.

The photograph of Carlyle is viewed by critics and historians as Cameron's greatest portrait. The critic Roger Fry spoke highly of this photograph when he compared it to other portraits of Carlyle by the painters Whistler and Watts: "Neither Whistler nor Watts come near to this in breadth of conception, in the logic of the plastic evocations, and neither approach the poignancy of the relation of character."⁹ The biographer, Helmut Gernsheim wrote "It is as if suddenly the picture began to speak, terrifically ugly and woebegone, but has something of likeness - my candid opinion."¹⁰ The Carlyle portrait is indeed the photographer's most dramatic work. An intimate and haunting quality permeates the work. This quality is emphasized by the reduction of tonal graduation to a few dark tones, sudden highlights and the soft focus of the image.

The Influence of G.F. Watts

To aid her artistic development, Cameron looked to contemporary art for technical guidance and inspiration. She turned to the paintings of George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) for a mature and perfected aesthetic that could be translated into photographic images. From Watts, Cameron derived the criteria for judging the artistic value of her photographs. They met and became close companions at Sarah Prinsep's Kensington home, Little Holland House. Watts lived and worked in a studio on the ground of

Little Holland House for twenty-five years. Like Cameron, his position in artistic and literary circles gave him access to the most eminent personalities of the Victorian era.

As the foremost Victorian portrait painter, Watts is considered a transitional figure between the academic portrait school of Sir Thomas Lawrence of the early 19th century and the revolutionary modern portraits of the 1880's introduced by Whistler and Sargent.¹² In a book published in 1904, the year of Watt's death, G.K. Chesterton wrote that the painter

"more than any other modern man, and much more than politicians who thundered on platforms or financiers who captured continents. . .has sought in the midst of his quiet and hidden life to mirror his age."¹²

Watts's portraits of great Victorian figures are regarded by critics and art historians as his most significant work, although the painter himself considered his allegorical paintings first in importance. In all his work, Watts sought to achieve the highest ideal of human expression. He wrote that a portrait "should have something of the monumental; it is a summary of the life of a person, not the record of accidental positions or arrangement of light and shadows."¹³ Following the idealistic teachings of writers such as Carlyle, Watts combined in his portrait painting the unseen reality of the spirit and the reality of the factual world. It was this modern and romantic conception of portraiture that drew Cameron to the work of Watts.

Watts came to prominence when Pre-Raphaelitism was emerging as a significant force in Victorian art. Though not a member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, Watts shares a concern for symbol, mystery and the inner reality of the spirit characteristic of the second half of the

nineteenth century. As an artist, he was an individualist. Amidst the changing climate of Victorian age, Watts returned a singular artistic vision: to produce unique and expressive portraits of the highest quality. He wanted to attach an aesthetic value to portraits that revealed a subjective and symbolic interpretation. On his role as an artist, Watts wrote:

"I paint ideas, not things. I paint primarily because I have something to say, and since the gift of eloquent language has been denied me, I use painting: my intention is not so much to paint pictures which shall please the eye, as to suggest great thoughts which shall speak to the imagination and to the heart and arouse all that is best and noblest in humanity."¹⁴

Watts instructed Cameron to photograph things as she saw them through her camera's eye: "What is, is, and one should not desire to make it seem to be other."¹⁵ To this end the photographer never enlarged or retouched a photograph. The painter also encouraged Cameron to study the Old Masters, in particular Rembrandt. She found in the paintings of Rembrandt a mysterious and poetic atmosphere and a dramatic light effect that could be easily incorporated into her photographic portraits. Along with the close-up, the Rembrandtesque quality of Cameron's photographs established another innovative approach to portraiture. It is important to note that the Rembrandtesque effect in lighting pertains to her portraits of famous men. In the portraits of beautiful women, the light is more graduated to emphasize the subject's physical beauty. Cameron was drawn to the work of Rembrandt because it combined realistic representation with symbolic interpretation.

Watts's painting of Thomas Carlyle (Figure 3), which was produced at the same time as Cameron's portrait, reveals a Rembrandtesque lighting



Figure 3

G.F. Watts. Thomas Carlyle. 1864.

effect. This expressive painting shows the upper torso, hands and head of Carlyle shrouded in dark shadows. As in Cameron's photograph, the face, and in particular, the eyes are clearly defined although other features are diffused and blend into the mysterious background. The dramatic play of light across the hands and face suggests a spiritual essence that appears to emanate from the subject. The employment of a monochromatic palette and a softened focus represent Watt's adoption of the romantic concept of symbolic synthesis: the expressive plasticity of Carlyle's features as they emerge from the shadows create a symbolic image of the historian's creative spirit. Both the painting and photograph of Carlyle point out the affinity of compositional, stylistic, and aesthetic views that existed between Watts and Cameron.

The influence of Watts on the portrait photography of Cameron can be characterized by the following two elements: first, the exploration of the spiritual force or soul of man and second, a stylistic method which combined a close-up pictorial view with a dramatic light effect. Another portrait by Cameron that reveals the influence of Watts is the 1864 photograph depicting the painter himself (Figure 4). In this portrait, Cameron again focuses on the upper torso and head of her subject. The mysterious atmosphere and dramatic light depicted in this picture is reminiscent of Watts's paintings. The profile head of the artist is bent in contemplation. Manipulating the window blind in her studio, Cameron produced shafts of natural light that reflect off the brow, shoulder and hand of Watts. The soft and mysterious atmosphere that surrounds the artist lends itself to a symbolic interpretation. This photograph is an eloquent and convincing study of the modern ideal of portraiture: inherently personal, spiritual and heroic.

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Figure 4

J.M. Cameron. G.F. Watts. 1864.

Following the teaching of Watts, Cameron sought to associate her photographs to paintings of the day. She was one of the first photographers to insist that portrait photography could be more than a commercial medium. In an artist's hands, these mechanical and chemical processes produced works of symbolic and romantic importance.

The Influence of David Wilkie Wynfield

The portrait photographs of David Wilkie Wynfield (1837-1887) were another artistic source of compositional and stylistic elements adopted by Cameron. Wynfield, a nephew of the great British painter, Sir David Wilkie, was a painter, as well as an amateur photographer. Although little has been written about his life and work, he is best known as the founder of a small society of artists living in St. John's Woods called the St. John's Wood Clique. This community was formed about 1860. Its name was derived from an earlier nineteenth century art movement headed by the British artists Augustus Egg and W.P. Frith. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Clique reacted against the authority and conventions of the established Royal Academy. One important view that this community shared with the Pre-Raphaelites was a reverence for past art, literature and heroic ideals. As a painter and photographer, Wynfield was intrigued by the artistic relationship between painting and photography. He believed that artistic portraiture could be achieved by rejecting modern clothing and employing a soft focus to convey a 'painterly' effect.

Like his famous uncle, Wynfield distinguished himself as a portraitist. His portrait photographs investigate the tenuous connection between art and life. Perhaps it was this aspect that attracted Cameron to Wynfield's portrait photographs. Working in the 1860's, he took pictures of famous men dressed in historical costumes. His portraits are

not heroic characterizations like Cameron's portraits of great men; instead, they are imaginative representations. Wynfield's idealized portraits characterize the Victorian obsession for historical stories and costume pictures.

It was suggested by many nineteenth century critics that Wynfield taught Cameron his photographic techniques. This supposition has never been documented. Nevertheless, Cameron was greatly influenced by the portrait photographs by Wynfield. He was the one photographer whose work Cameron prized more than any other. In a letter to William Rossetti, Cameron writes of her admiration for Wynfield: "(To) his beautiful photography I owe all my attempts and indeed all my success."¹⁶

The photograph Sir John Millais as Dante of 1862 (Figure 5), is a perfect example of Wynfield's photographic style and technique. In this portrait, Millais is dressed as the great writer. Accessories such as the wreath and the book serve to illustrate the creative genius of Dante. Wynfield concentrated his camera on the head of Millais, which is shown in profile. The image is slightly out-of-focus, so that the outline of the face and upper body is softened. Wynfield believed that a soft focus gave a photographic image the appearance of an artistic and 'painterly' effect. To emphasize this effect, he covered his subjects in dark drapery and posed them against a semi-dark background. Thus, the highlighted areas, the face and hands are accentuated.

Wynfield's portrait photographs were a direct source of the compositional and technical devices employed by Cameron. Like him, she wanted her portraits to have an artistic look. Wynfield's influence can be noted in the 1867 portrait of Sir Henry Taylor (Figure 6) and the 1864 photograph of the Pre-Raphaelite painter, William Holman Hunt (Figure 7).



Figure 5

David Wilkie Wynfield. Sir John Millais as Dante. 1862.



Figure 6

J.M. Cameron. Sir Henry Taylor. 1867.



Figure 7

J.M. Cameron. William Holman Hunt. 1864.

In both pictures, Cameron had dressed her models in costumes. The poet wears a large velvet beret and a dark cloak that symbolized the scholarly and creative activity of his work. Interestingly, the beret is reminiscent of the kind of accessory used by Rembrandt in many of his paintings. Holman Hunt is garbed in an eastern costume he wore while painting in the Middle East. The apparel worn by both these men serves to illustrate their romantic character. The accessories and costumes give an added pictorial accent to the compositions. They also speak visually of the sitter's personality. As in Wynfield's photograph of Millais, Cameron places Taylor and Hunt in front of a dark background. The dark clothing worn by Taylor emphasized the dramatically lit area of the face and hands.

In both portraits, Cameron focuses on a close-up picture of her subjects. Utilizing the long focal length lens, she produces an image that is sharply defined in the center but distorted in surrounding areas. Her softened focus, although greatly exaggerated, is similar to the kind found in Wynfield's imaginative representation. In the portraits by Cameron and Wynfield, innovative compositional and technical elements combine to produce a 'painterly' expression. By emphasizing this expression, both photographers sought to raise the artistic standards of portrait photography.

The Impact of John Casper Lavater's Theories of Physiognomy

In her portraits, Cameron attempted to penetrate man's physical facade and explore the more spiritual self. She believed that a person's moral and noble nature was mirrored in their facial features. This view can be traced back to the physiognomic theories of the late eighteenth century German writer, John Casper Lavater. His studies concluded "that an individual's moral state affects his physical features"¹⁷ As the

father of physiognomy, Lavater's work was accepted as a scientific system. His famous essays on Physiognomy included drawings that depicted human faces characterized by their moral state. His system was highly regarded as an approach to analyzing human nature in the early to mid-nineteenth century until the popular acknowledgment of Darwin's theory of evolution. The portraits of famous men by Cameron confirm her acceptance of Lavater's theories as helpful in photographing her subjects.

The profile of the human head was to Lavater's mind, "the truest representation that can be given to a man."¹⁸ Cameron adopted this idea and posed many of her subjects in profile. She believed that the configuration of the nose reflected the moral spirit of the sitter. In a reference to the photography of Mr. W.R. Gregg, Cameron suggested that "all character, will force, and superiority in general, evidenced themselves through the size of the nose and the height of the bridge."¹⁹ This view parallels Lavater's theory on the heroic qualities of the nose:

"I believe it has already been said that I hold the nose to be the foundation, or abutment of the brain. Whoever is acquainted with the Gothic arch will perfectly understand what I mean by abutment; for upon this the whole power of the arch of the forehead rests, and without it the mount and cheeks would be oppressed by miserable ruins. . .Noses. . .which are arched near the forehead, are capable of command, can rule, act, overcome, destroy. . .Small nostrils are usually an indubitable sign of an enterprising timidity. The open, breathing nostril, is as certain a token of sensibility, which may easily degenerate into sensuality."²⁰

The striking 1868 portrait of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Figure 8) illustrates Cameron's acceptance of Lavater's physiognomic theories. In this close-up picture, the photographer dramatically emphasized the nose and forehead of the poet by posing him in profile. These features

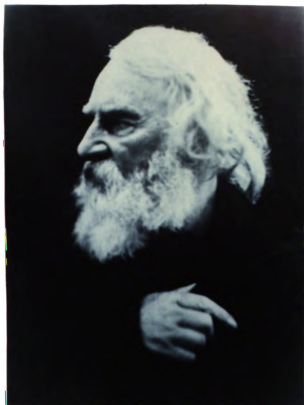


Figure 8

J.M. Cameron. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. 1868.

comprise the most sharply defined area in the photograph. Cameron also accentuates the facial features by creating a poetic quality of light. This light appears to emanate directly from the head of Longfellow. The strong and highlighted outline of the nose and forehead lends itself to an interpretive reading of the poet's noble and moral character. Cameron does not allow any part of the photograph to distract from Longfellow's profile. Draped in black velvet, the poet's upper torso melts into the dark background. The setting in this portrait conveys a spiritual rather than a contemporary world.

In the Longfellow portrait, there is an implied continuation of space. The head of the poet is turned to the left and his eyes focus on something outside the frame of the picture. The hand that clutches the back drapery points to the right side of the frame. There appears to be two strong opposing forces working within this photograph. These forces are united in the diagonal line that runs from the nose to the pointing index finger. Both the telling gesture of the hands and the expressive lighting of the head suggests a heroic characterization of human physiognomy.

The facial features, head and hand of Longfellow can be viewed as individual parts or fragments. Yet once combined in the observer's eye, these fragments make up a large and more symbolic whole. Cameron has captured on the photographic plate the living moment and has transformed it into something eternal.

The direct relationship between art and life is constantly being questioned in Cameron's portraits of famous men. When observing her portraits one is always aware of the human characteristics of the sitter; thus, the photograph is evidence of the physical reality of life. Yet,

Date	Time	Remarks
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Cameron expands on the meaning of her portraits by interjecting romantic and subjective values. Her portraits can be read as character analysis or heroic representations. These interpretations suggest that a portrait is not only an important document of life but a work of artistic merit.

Chapter Four

Portrait Photographs of Beautiful Women – Ideal Beauty and Poetic Symbolism

That Beauty is not, as fond men misdeem,
An outward show of things, than only seem;
But that fair lamp, from whose celestial ray
That light proceeds which kindleth lovers fire,
Shall never be extinguished nor decay;
But, when the vital spirits do expire,
Unto her native planet shall retire,
For it is heavenly born and cannot die,
Being a parcel of the purest sky.

-Edmund Spenser¹

In the late 1880's, Julia Margaret Cameron began to produce photographs of beautiful women which celebrate the theme of ideal beauty and poetic symbolism. These pictures of ideal beauty play an essential role in nineteenth century photography because they establish a new relationship between romantic poetry, symbolic imagery and expressive pictorial techniques. For Cameron, the image of ideal beauty figuratively expressed the invisible and divine world of the human soul. She used symbolic imagery in her photographs of beautiful women to communicate moral and spiritual truths. Like the portraits of famous men, these photographs can be interpreted as portraits or symbolic characterizations. They represent Cameron's attempt to bridge the gap between life's realities and the ideal world of the human soul. In this chapter we will explore the way in which John Ruskin's theories of the sister arts and ideal beauty influenced Cameron's portraits of beautiful women. We will

also investigate the artistic climate that encouraged Cameron, the Pre-Raphaelites, in particular Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to develop poetic subject matter, techniques and symbolic imagery.

The Importance of Romantic Poetry in
Cameron's Portraits of Beautiful Women

In the third volume of Modern Painters, John Ruskin wrote of the direct relationship between painting and poetry. This relationship was the foundation for his theory of the sister arts.

"Painting is properly opposed to speaking or writing, but not to poetry. Both painting and speaking are methods of expression.² Poetry is the employment of either for the noblest purposes."

In her attempt to align her photographs to fine art, Cameron recognized that her work could visually express a poetic content similar to that exhibited in contemporary painting. Like Ruskin, she believed that artists must look to poetry as a model and a source of subject matter, symbolic imagery and idealistic principles. Ruskin's theory of the sister arts inspired Cameron because it forged an alliance between art and modern romantic poetry. Ruskin, himself, insisted that both arts shared a common goal: to educate and ennoble its audience. He vigorously promoted the idea that artists were visual 'poets' who possessed, like their literary counterparts, a spiritual insight based on personal expression. Of similar belief, Cameron regarded her photographic work not as a mere mechanical craft but as an intellectual and noble discipline.

Exemplifying this belief of an alliance between romantic poetry and photography are Cameron's portraits of beautiful women. To emphasize the close relationship between these two arts, she often gave her portraits

poetic titles and epitaphs. One picture that illustrates this relationship is the 1866 photograph of May Prinsep as the heroine of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem Christabel (Figure 9). In this work, Cameron centers her attention on the emotional content of Coleridge's poem.

"The lovely lady, Christabel,
Whom her father loves so well,
What makes her in the wood so late
A far long from this castle gate?

She had dreams all yesternight
of her own betroved knight;
And she in the midnight wood
will pray
For the weal of her lover's that's
far away"³

Cameron translated the romantic quality of this poem into photographic image by employing a method that is simple and expressive: she records a close-up picture of Prinsep, whose head dramatically emerges from an obscure background. There are no accessories or objects in this picture to suggest that this is a characterization of Coleridge's Christabel. Only the poetic title given by Cameron reveals the symbolic meaning of this image.

On the mount of this photograph Cameron inscribed the following: Cristabel/Portrait of May Prinsep. Consequently, this picture can be read as a portrait or an allegorical characterization. On the one hand, the physical reality of the model suggests that this photograph is primarily a portrait; while on the other, the poetic title and suggestive photographic technique conveys a romantic significance. To Cameron, May Prinsep is transformed before the camera's eye into an idealized personification of Coleridge's heroine. In this work, the photographer



Figure 9

J.M. Cameron. Christabel/Portrait of May Prinsep. 1866.

sought to depict the symbolic relationship between the real and the ideal.

Cameron's romantic conception of photography was enhanced by her poetic vision and modern ideas. She viewed her portraits of women as symbolic and artistic works and as revelations of moral and spiritual truths. Cameron perceived beauty as the embodiment of an inner ideal. She believed that visual beauty could serve to illustrate spiritual and moral values. Her philosophy of beauty resembles that of John Ruskin. The artist and the historian sought to introduce a symbolic and moral order to art. Ruskin's theory of beauty represented to Cameron a practical theory that could be translated into her photographic images.

The Influence of Ruskin's Theory of Beauty

Cameron's insistence on beauty in her photographic work is the strongest link between her art and the theoretical writings of John Ruskin. The impact of Ruskin's theory of beauty, in part, induced Cameron to go beyond a woman's facade and explore the more spiritual self. In volume two of Modern Painters, Ruskin devised an aesthetic theory of beauty based on two interdependent principles: first, typical beauty, which represents external or visual beauty; and second, vital beauty, which represents the internal state of emotion and spirituality.⁴ Cameron attempted to combine both typical and vital beauty in her photographs through the expressive use of poetic language and symbolic imagery.

Of the portraits of women none is more a powerful example of Cameron's devotion to beauty than The Echo of 1868 (Figure 10). The poetic inscription of the print evokes the pictorial image: "And music born of murmuring sound/ Shall pass into her face."⁵ Cameron's dramatic employment of a romantic verse emphasizes the union between the written word and the created image. The poetic epitaph and the visual beauty of



Figure 10

J.M. Cameron. The Echo. 1868.

the model, Hattie Campbell, implies an explicit symbol of vital beauty. The model's head and face reflects Cameron's romantic vision of ideal woman—passionate, iconic and the embodiment of sacred ideals. This photograph has all the qualities of a 'spirit' picture. Like an apparition, the model appears to float in the foreground plane. She looks into the camera with an unwavering eye. Her face exudes a sense of solemnity that is reminiscent of the classical conventions of grace and moral virtue established by the Greek and the Renaissance masters. This symbolic association between the past and the present is further emphasized by the simple white costume worn by the model. In The Echo, the combination of poetic language and visual symbolism creates a compelling image of both typical and vital beauty.

The Echo is also a photograph of important imaginative achievement. Cameron employs a romantic method that guides the spectator visually and associatively. It is an image that must be read in order to comprehend its explicit symbolism and romantic message. Cameron surrounds the figure with a misty atmosphere implying that it is divine and ideal. The absence of spatial depth conveys a feeling of stillness and unreality. The suggestive incompleteness of the photograph demands the imaginative participation of the spectator. Through connotation rather than denotation, Cameron has placed this work in a new relationship to the spectator. She wants her audience to use their imaginations so that they will become part of the physical and psychological world of the subject. This romantic concept was promoted by Cameron in an attempt to establish a creative relationship between the artist and the public.

Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelites: the Cult of Beauty

Cameron's portraits of beautiful women show a strong visual and poetic resemblance to paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites, in particular Dante G. Rossetti. Like Cameron, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was inspired by romantic poetry and the idealistic teachings of John Ruskin. They embraced Ruskin's notion that painting was a "noble and expressive language."⁶ The Brotherhood was guided by an idealistic and poetic vision. The scholar William Gaunt summarized the artistic and philosophical ideals of the the Pre-Raphaelites when he wrote:

"the group had acted as a medium for the Romantic spirit of the century whose essence was a love of the past and of a sophisticated nature. It was linked to the Romantic poetry, with the Gothic and religious revival, with the reaction against the Industrial Revolution; with Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly, Rugin and Pusey, the anti-Victorian thinkers Ruskin and Carlyle, though the Italian masters of the later Middle Ages, who provided its curious name, it had very little to do. It had also the realist, reforming spirit of 1848."

In their work the Pre-Raphaelites painted romantic themes by emphasizing poetic language and symbolic imagery. Thus, they share with Cameron a common interest in poetic subject matter and romantic sentiment. The only major difference between the art of Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelites is their pictorial technique. The Pre-Raphaelites attempted to interject into their work a 'truth to nature', so they painted with 'photographic' detail every object and form with bright color and hard edges. Poetic symbols were depicted in the same manner with meticulously defined expression and detail. Cameron does not share this Pre-Raphaelite concern for detail. Instead, she illustrated a poetic symbol and an atmospheric effect by softening the photographic likeness. In Cameron's work, there is a personal 'truth to image' rather than a Pre-Raphaelite

'truth to nature'.

An important theme in the art of Cameron and the Pre-Raphaelites is the symbolic image of ideal beauty. The Pre-Raphaelite notion of ideal beauty corresponds to that of Cameron and Ruskin. Thus, the image of the beautiful woman shows not only the typical beauty of the body, but also the attempts to express the vital beauty of the the spirit. In The Aesthetic Movement of England, W. Hamilton describes the Pre-Raphaelite model of ideal beauty as

"a pale distraught lady with matted dark auburn hair falling in masses over the brow, and shading eyes full of love-lorn languor, or feverish despair; emaciated cheeks and somewhat heavy jaws, protruding upper lip, the lower lip being drawn, long crane neck, flat breasts, and long thin nervous hand."⁸

For the Pre-Raphaelites, and Cameron as well, pictures such as this beautiful figure of a woman personify moral and spiritual truths.

Indeed Cameron was as influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite image of ideal beauty that she patterned many of her photographs after their paintings. In the Garden of 1870 (Figure 11) illustrates her attempts to emulate the poetic composition and mood of Arthur Hughes' 1855/6 painting entitled April Love (Figure 12). Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856, April Love had been inspired by a stanza from the poem Miller's Daughter by the English romantic poet, Alfred Tennyson.

"Love is hurt from jar and fret
Love is made a vague regret.
Eyes with idle tears are wet.
Idle habit links us yet.
What is love? For we forget:
Ah, no! no!"⁹

In this work Hughes composes a scene which is melancholic and



Figure 11

J.M. Cameron. In the Garden. 1870.



Figure 12

Arthur Hughes. April Love. 1855/56.

lyrical. Posed against an ivy covered garden niche, a female figure turns away from her lover and gazes at scattered flower petals on the stone floor. This woman symbolizes one aspect of ideal beauty and love. Her soulful and beautiful expression exudes a sense of innate spiritualness.

Cameron's own concern for spiritual romanticism can be seen in the photograph In the Garden. Inspired by Hughes's painting and Tennyson's poem, Cameron employs a Pre-Raphaelite pictorial vocabulary to create an image of ideal beauty and love. The bower of roses, which underneath a solitary figure of a woman stands, is a visual and poetic metaphor of a romantic nature. The face and figure of the woman is a typical Pre-Raphaelite model of ideal beauty. She stands before the garden wall, her hair flowing loosely around her body. Clothed in a simple white garment, the woman reaches out to the flowers. She sadly looks at some person or thing outside the picture frame. The spiritual note of this composition lies in the woman's hesitant gesture and her expression. Unlike the detailed painting technique used by Hughes, Cameron allows for a suggestive treatment of the subject. The soft lighting and focus evokes the invisible world of the spirit. The human and spiritual message of In the Garden represents Cameron's desire to produce a work of romantic importance.

Although In the Garden deals primarily with a contemporary subject and setting, the symbolic visual references suggest a religious and, most probably, a Christian message. Like Hughes, Cameron viewed nature and beauty as qualities related to sacred and moral ideals. In the photograph, the rose garden symbolizes the sacredness of womanhood. In Christian symbolism, white roses are considered a symbol of purity and triumphant love. So, the white roses and the universal quality of the

woman's simple white dress and long hair suggests a religious meaning. Through symbolic visual references, Cameron creates an image that conveys, in a contemporary manner, a religious message of sacred and moral ideals.

In 1870 Cameron produced a photographic work entitled Pre-Raphaelite Study (Figure 13). This picture reveals the photographer's direct borrowing of Pre-Raphaelite compositional elements. May Prinsep, the model in the Pre-Raphaelite Study, strikes a pose that is almost identical to that of Isabella in W. Holman Hunt's Isabella and the Pot of Basil (Figure 14). Even Prinsep's facial expression echoes that of Isabella. In each work the pose and languid expression of the model reflects a romantic image of Pre-Raphaelite beauty. In a 1835 Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful, Charles Cameron, the photographer's husband, wrote of the poetic interpretation of this type of pose and soulful expression in art:

"A weeping willow, as the very name of the species indicates, represents the attitude, and therefore partakes of the beauty of sorrow. . . Everything, therefore, which droops (for that word seems to express the whole idea of bending downwards, without any pressure, from the mere effect of gravitation and the want of support) has a sorrowful and beautiful expression. Hence, it is, that the painters when they fill the mind with images of grief, not only dispose the head and limbs of their figures as grief would dispose them, but take care that the hair and the drapery shall also droop. . ."10

The curve and shape of Hunt's Isabella, as well as the melancholic look in her eyes, are Pre-Raphaelite motifs of beauty and sorrow that Cameron will translate into many of her finished photographs.

A comparison with Hughes and Hunt reveals Cameron's desire to introduce a Pre-Raphaelite vision to photography. Her photographs of beautiful women, which often cross the line between portraiture and allegory, combine physical fact with a romantic concern for ideal beauty



Figure 13

J.M. Cameron. Pre-Raphaelite Study. 1870.



Figure 14

W. Holman Hunt. Isabella and the Pot of Basil.

and spiritual values. There is one other Pre-Raphaelite artist with whom Cameron shares similar aesthetic and stylistic ideas – Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Cameron and Rossetti: Poetic Visionaries

Dante G. Rossetti's paintings of women directly influenced the photographic work of Cameron. As an original member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he was interested in romantic expression, subject matter and beauty. To many Victorian poets and artists, his work in painting and poetry represented a revival of past ideals and spiritual values. In his arts, Rossetti sought a more symbolic treatment of subjective experiences. In this way, his work anticipated the attitudes and concerns of the Symbolist movement of the 1890's. Rossetti's subjects and poetic themes reveal his symbolist tendencies: the supernatural world of dreams, the idyllic world of beautiful women and the inner world of the human spirit. Like Cameron, Rossetti admired John Ruskin's theories of ideal beauty and the sister arts. As a painter, poet and amateur photographer, he often attached poetic titles and epitaphs to his work. Cameron was inspired by Rossetti's poetic vision and symbolic representations of beautiful women. In her photographic work, Cameron, like Rossetti, attempts to bridge the gulf between the ordinary world of reality and the ideal world of the imagination.

It was at Sarah Prinsep's Little Holland House that Cameron met Dante G. Rossetti and his brother, the writer William M. Rossetti. Although she was unable to persuade the artist to sit for a portrait, Cameron gave him many of her photographs. Seeking artistic guidance and support, she encouraged Rossetti to visit her photographic exhibitions. In a letter to William Rossetti, Cameron notes the artist's response to a show of her

work at Colnaghi's gallery in 1865:

"Your brother went to my gallery and his enthusiasm as reported to me was one of my greatest rewards."¹¹

Rossetti's response was the type of assurance that Cameron was searching for from the art community. In 1874, she pointed to Rossetti as an admirer of her photographic work in a letter to her friend Sir Edward Ryan:

"Artists, Mr. Watts and Mr. Rossetti, indeed all artists say that mine is the only photography in the world which gives them pure unmixed delight."¹²

Cameron's remark appear to suggest that Rossetti saw artistic as well as aesthetic value in her work. The symbolic imagery and poetic devices which Cameron employed in her photographs, Rossetti also utilized in his paintings and poetry. It is probable, then, that her first-hand knowledge of Rossetti's work in both arts helped to condition her investigation of the romantic theme of ideal beauty and the sister arts.

In their work, Cameron and Rossetti welcomed the use of symbolic imagery to see beyond the exterior phenomena of beauty to the inner world of the spirit, of suggestion and the subconscious. One writer who was instrumental in directing both artists in their exploration of symbolic imagery was Thomas Carlyle. He wrote that "In the Symbol proper. . .there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite."¹³ For Cameron and Rossetti, symbolic imagery was a visual, as well as a poetical vocabulary capable of conveying the illusive ideals of the spiritual world. Symbolic motifs, such as flowers, a woman's flowing hair and simple long dress, are images which are

repeatedly found in each artist's pictures of beautiful women.

Symbolic imagery enabled Cameron and Rossetti to reaffirm the primacy of the artist's imagination in art. For them, the use of symbolic imagery reflected an imaginative spirit that enabled an artist to symbolize experiences and emotions in art. Imagination, then, was a part of a creative process that was based on personal feeling, intuition and subjective experience. Through the imaginative employment of symbolic imagery, Rossetti and Cameron transformed the ordinary reality of the world into an ideal world of spiritual and moral truths.

The influence of Rossetti's paintings on the photographic work of Cameron can be seen in the photographer's choice of models who bear a close physical resemblance to the women found in Rossetti's work. For Cameron and Rossetti, the image of ideal beauty is based on living women whose facial features illustrate a melancholic and soulful expression. The very presence of a woman in their work reveals a living character as well as the immediate reality of the spiritual world. A comparison between the female figures in Cameron's 1868 photograph The Rosebud Garden of Girls (Figure 15) and Rossetti's 1866 painting The Beloved (Figure 16) shows a similar treatment of pose, gesture and expression. It is believed that Rossetti's painting served as a compositional model for Cameron's photograph.¹⁴

In The Rosebud Garden of Girls, Cameron once again illustrates a line from a romantic poem. The photograph's title is taken from the poem "Maud" by A. Tennyson. In order to create a poetic and naturalistic environment in her studio, Cameron designed a backdrop filled with foliage and blossoms. She then positioned her four models, Mrs. G.F. Watts and her sisters, in front of this naturalistic setting. Each woman, dressed in



Figure 15

J.M. Cameron. The Rosebud Garden of Girls. 1868.

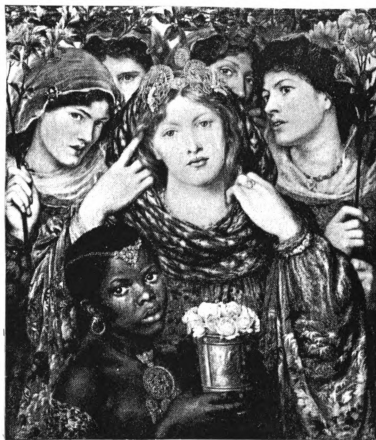


Figure 16

Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The Beloved. 1866.

long, flowing white garments, holds a flower. In this picture, as in the photograph In the Garden, Cameron emphasizes the symbolic relationship between nature and beauty. The four women, turned towards the center of the composition, create a strong unified image. Their quiet poses and simplified telling gestures do not oppose the frame's confining edges. Yet their glances and melancholic facial expressions suggest a tension that lies just beneath the surface of the picture. Although the women turn towards each other, they do not acknowledge each others presence. Each figure appears lost in individual thought. This impression is heightened by the soft and suggestive focus of the image. A similar treatment of facial expression and figure arrangement can be found in Rossetti's The Beloved.

In his painting, Rossetti uses the female figures to build, with horizontals and verticals, elements that compose the frame's edge. He places in the center of the composition a woman who is flanked on either side by another female figure. Behind this central image, two other women emerge, their eyes fixed upon the viewer. Crowning the entire composition is a floral arbor. All the women turn towards the center, each holding a flower. They do not acknowledge one another, but appear occupied with their own thoughts. From Rossetti, Cameron had learned an important pictorial lesson: the wedding of figural configuration with a natural setting to produce a compelling poetic image of beauty and introspective reflection.

Just as the floral environment in The Rosebud Garden of Girls helps to depict an idyllic environment, Cameron's models, with their long melancholic faces and flowing wavy hair, do much to impart a symbolic expression of ideal beauty and love. Largely from Rossetti's paintings of

women, including The Beloved, Cameron had been inspired to adopt a specific type of model as the embodiment of inner ideals. In The Rosebud Garden of Girls, the women are positioned against a dark, mysterious background so that the long, soft contours of their faces are clearly seen. The long wavy hair worn by each woman is arranged in such a way to softly frame the face suggesting a poetic effect. The eyes of the models, whether they are closed in reflection or wide open in anticipation, mirror an expressive mystical spirit. All the women in Cameron's photograph bear such a strong resemblance to each other that they give the impression of being the same woman — a specific image of ideal beauty. This ideal image appears in many of the photographer's portraits of beautiful women, including Alice Liddell of 1872 (Figure 17) and May Prinsep of 1874. These photographs reveal Cameron's conscious decision to choose female models whose physical features best illustrate her vision of ideal beauty.

In contrast to the passionate and sensual women of Rossetti's The Beloved, Cameron's vision of ideal beauty emphasizes a religious theme of purity and the sacredness of womanhood. To support this vision, the photographer employed Christian iconographical motifs. The symbolic image of a flowering trellis that encircles the four women typifies a specific Christian motif: a garden or paradisiacal world that encloses the purity of the Virgin within its walls. The flowers and the women's long hair and simple white dresses emphasizes the religious message of purity. Cameron's use of Christian symbolic imagery evokes a theme of moral and divine ideals. The floral display, costumes and the specific image of beauty in The Rosebud Garden of Girls symbolizes an earthly purity, as well as a heavenly realm.

For Cameron, the combination of symbolic imagery, that has Christian



Figure 17

J.M. Cameron. Alice Liddell. 1872.

overtones, and contemporary subject matter, enabled her to reaffirm past ideals and spiritual and moral values. Her depictions of beautiful women are like those of Rossetti, in that they offer a complexity of interpretations. Enigmatic, symbolic and ideal – these are terms which characterized the works of Cameron and Rossetti. The photographer would have agreed with Rossetti's assessment that an artist's task is "to embody and symbolize without interfering with the subject as a subject."¹⁵ Her most inventive photographs are those which maintain the integrity and character of her subject while transforming the image into an ideal symbol.

Hypatia/Marie Spartali of 1867 (Figure 18) illustrates Cameron's ability to take a scared and legendary subject and fuse it's historic character with the beautiful features of the model, Marie Spartali. A neo-platonic philosopher, Hypatia was sentenced to death by the Church of Alexandra for being a Circe. In this work, Cameron deals with a subject that has classical as well as Christian overtones. The intellectual character of Hypatia is realized in Spartali's brooding expression. Cameron focuses on the model's heavy brow, her dark, reflective eyes and her abundance of heavy, flowing hair. The mysterious world of the photograph and the hesitant pose of Spartali suggests a moment of indecision. Wearing a dress copied from Rossetti's Sardonian the Sorceress, Spartali, a popular Pre-Raphaelite model, is transformed into a sacred and ideal figure. Consequently, the symbolic meaning of Hypatia lies somewhere between photographic fact and allegorical personification.

In nineteenth century painting and photography, the romantic and imaginative theme of ideal beauty enabled artists to create emotional and uniquely personal works. This theme and its symbolic power lead Cameron,



Figure 18

J.M. Cameron. Hypatia. 1867.

Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin to establish a new relationship between art and Victorian life. In portrait photography, Cameron's pictures of beautiful women ushered in a new era. The union of the written word and the photographic image produced pictures of romantic and symbolic importance. The portrait photograph was no longer regarded as a mere record of fact. It now took its place alongside contemporary works of fine art.

The theme of ideal beauty, which Cameron touted in her photographs of women, became increasingly popular in art and literature as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The next generation of American and European photographers learned from the portrait photographs of Cameron. Her use of poetic subject matter, symbolic imagery and expressive pictorial effects inspired photographers to treat idealistic themes in a more subjective and modern manner.

Chapter Five

Cameron and Her Influence on Late Victorian Photography and the American Pictorial Movement

The intertwining ideals of Truth, Beauty, Nature, and Imagination promoted in the writings of Carlyle and Ruskin and in the portrait photography of Cameron inspired a new generation of amateur and professional photographers to found secessionist organizations seeking to introduce personal expression and a new modern idealism into Late Victorian photography. These photographers considered themselves picture-makers. "I, the artist, am not a machine, the camera is merely my servant."¹ They advocated that photography was a fine art; a medium as important but independent from painting and the graphic arts.

Photography as representational of idealistic values and artistic excellence was a uniquely modern view which dominated photographic theory from the late nineteenth century into the second decade of the twentieth century in Europe and America. However, the origin of this view can, in part, be found in the words and work of Julia Margaret Cameron. "My aspirations are to enoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art."² Her use of ideal and heroic subject matter, symbolic imagery and an expressive soft focus photographic technique influenced Late Victorian photographers to turn the camera's eye on the inner world of the unknown. Cameron's portraits of beautiful women and

great men were to be an artistic and aesthetic touchstone for these photographers. Portraiture, which exalted the spirit and creativity of human life, became a major motif in photography of the Late Victorian period.

Cameron and Late Victorian Photography: P.H. Emerson and H.P. Robinson

In the 1920's, P.H. Emerson, an influential photographer and father of the Naturalistic School of Photography, awarded to innovative photographers, living or dead, the Emerson medal for artistic merit. Included in his list of outstanding photographers was Julia Margaret Cameron - "for her portraits only."³ Emerson wrote in the October 1890 issue of "Sun Artists" that Cameron "remains to this day unapproached, and there are no signs of any comer to dispute her towering ability."⁴ Having published a book of her photographs in 1889, he instructed his followers to study her portraits. Many late Victorian photographers, including Emerson, regarded Cameron's soft focus portraits as revolutionary. For them, Cameron's expressive and instinctual photographic techniques and her romantic treatment of a subject comprised an unconventional and inspired photographic vision. As the founder of Naturalistic Photography, Emerson pointed to Cameron as an early advocate of naturalistic and spontaneous pictorial effects. In addition, he, like Cameron, was devoted to advancing the cause of art-photography.

In his 1889 textbook Naturalistic Photography, Emerson introduced his aesthetic and technical principles of photography. Renouncing sentimentality and artificiality, the photographer propounded a 'truthful' and naturalistic approach to picture-making based on science, optics and Helmholtz's theory of human vision.⁵ His photographic approach included the following guidelines: "1. Truth to subject. The true

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photographer...must have his camera ready...and when he sees his model in an unconscious and beautiful pose, he must snap his shutter. 2.

Photographic freedom – no rules or formulas. Each picture requires a special composition, and every artist treats each picture originally...The point is, what you have to say and how you say it. 3. No Retouching.

Avoid retouching in all its forms; it destroys texture and tone and therefore the truth of the picture."⁶ Studio manipulations, theatrical lighting and props had no place in Emerson's school of Naturalistic Photography. The camera went out-of-doors and exalted in the phenomena of nature and the imaginative spirit of the photographer.

The most controversial idea that emerged from Emerson's book was his theory of differential or soft focus. Influenced by Helmholtz's theory of Physiological Optics, the photographer believed that the camera must be truthful to human vision. In his mind, the camera's eye, like the human eye, should see clearly and sharply in the center of the field of vision, soft and slightly out-of-focus in the surrounding areas. Consequently, Emerson encouraged his followers to employ a differential focus in their work:

"Nothing in nature has a hard outline, but everything is seen against something else, and its outlines fade gently in something else, often so subtly that you cannot quite distinguish where one ends and the other begins. In this mingled decision and indecision, this lost and found, lies all the charm and mystery in nature."

Emerson's theory of differential focus had a great impact on British photography. Almost overnight, photographs of soft focused portraits, misty landscapes and cityscapes began to appear in photography studios and exhibition halls. Many photographers now saw the camera as a device which

recorded fact as well as a beautiful expression. Emerson had inspired photographers to implement a revolutionary and modern approach to photographic imagery.

While his 'naturalistic' principles of photography were accepted in progressive photographic circles, Emerson was never able to win over photographers who clung to didactic academic tenets. During the early 1890's, in photographic journals and newspaper articles, he debated the use and artistic merit of differential focus with H.P. Robinson, the influential leader of the academic Pictorial School of Photography. Although he brought the topic of differential focus to the public's attention, Emerson was not the first photographer to support the use of a differential focus in photography. In the 1860's, Julia Margaret Cameron promoted the use of differential or soft focus to achieve a 'painterly' and beautiful photographic effect. In an 1864 letter to Sir John Herschel, she asked, "What is focus - and who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?"⁸

Before Emerson and his school of Naturalistic Photography, Cameron stood alone in Victorian photography as a photographer who specialized in 'naturalistic' pictorial effects. She trusted the camera to record truthfully the physical character of a subject, so she never retouched an image. Instinctively, she realized that a soft or differential focus beautified a photographic image. For her, a soft focus blurred the sharp lines of reality just enough to convey a sense of mystery and spirituality. While her portraits were admired by progressive photographers, like Emerson, and painters, in particular Watts and the Pre-Raphaelites, academic photographers were shocked by her photographic methods and images. H.P. Robinson, the pictorial photographer and critic,

was so dismayed by Cameron's work that he launched a campaign to discredit her photographic methods.

H.P. Robinson was well known throughout the world as the leader of the Pictorial School of Photography. His influential book, Pictorial Effect in Photography, published in 1869, provided amateur and professional photographers with an aesthetic and compositional approach to picture-taking. He believed that photography should emulate academic paintings in subject and appearance. At a time in the history of art when photographers and artists were beginning to work out doors and directly from nature, Robinson instructed photographers to remain in their studios. He encouraged the use of manipulative photographic techniques, such as retouching and combination negative printing:

"Any dodge, trick and conjuration of any kind is open to the photographer's use. . .A great deal can be done and a very beautiful picture made, by a mixture of the real and the artificial in a picture."

Influenced by Robinson's writings and academic genre paintings, many Victorian photographers created literal depictions of life and nature by emphasizing pictorial detail and a strict perspective.

Throughout his career as a photographer and critic, Robinson promoted the view that photography was a medium based on fact and definition. Consequently, he believed that a photograph should be clear and well-defined. In support of his views, Robinson reproached any photographer whose methods failed to conform to traditional and academic practices. In a newspaper article he wrote disapprovingly of Cameron's unique photographic method saying "it is not the mission of photography to produce smudges."¹⁰ In the same article he referred to the larger

question of focus in her photography:

"If studies in light and shade only are required, let it be done in pigment or charcoal, with a mop, if necessary, but photography is pre-eminently the art of definition, and when an art departs from its function it is lost."¹¹

Robinson's preference for pictorial definition stems from his own positivistic view of photography. He believed that the true function of photography was to record faithfully and in detail the ordinary appearances of the world. In an attempt to align photography with Victorian painting, he endorsed academic rules of composition and aesthetics. Robinson saw little or no artistic value in Cameron's photographs because her soft focus technique and subjective handling of an image did not conform to traditional artistic standards, as supported by the official Photographic Society. For Cameron, there were no compositional or artistic rules in photography. Her inspiration came from a direct contact with life and nature. That is why she often wrote next to her portraits the phrase - 'from life'. Cameron believed that dramatic and poetic pictorial effects, such as those expressed by a softened focus, were an essential aspect of the function of photography.

The artistic merit of Cameron's photography was hotly debated in the British press during the 1860's. In specialist publications like The Photographic News and The Athenaeum, critics questioned whether Cameron's soft focus technique was in accordance with established artistic and photographic standards. After an exhibition of Cameron's portraits at the Photographic Society of London in 1864, a critic for The Photographic News noted

"As one of the special charms of photography consists in the

completeness, detail, and finish, we can scarcely commend works in which the aim appears to have been to avoid these qualities."¹²

However, not all photographers or critics believed that a detailed focus was the only function of photography. In 1864, a critic for The Athenaeum, commended Cameron for her soft focus technique:

"These productions are made out-of-focus, as the technical phrase is, and although sadly unconventional in the eyes of photographers, give us hope that something higher¹³ than mechanical success is obtainable by the camera."

Cameron's reputation as an innovative and unconventional photographer grew as her works were exhibited in Great Britain and Europe. Young photographers, like Emerson, searching for a more individualist approach to photography, were drawn to her photographs. Her soft focus technique and romantic visual vocabulary struck a chord among those photographers who wished to break away from the traditional principles of pictorial photography endorsed by H.P. Robinson. Consequently, two schools of photography emerged by the early 1880's; first, the academic pictorial school of H.P. Robinson, and second, the naturalistic school of P.H. Emerson. As leaders of their respective schools and members of the Photographic Society of London, Robinson and Emerson debated the legitimacy of differential focus throughout the late 1880's and early 1890's. Their battle over the true function of focus in photography caused fellow photographers to reassess the status and standards of Victorian photography. Many photographers who followed Emerson demanded that photography be reflective of personal values and advances in modern art. For these photographers, the portrait photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron were to be an influential force. Her unique technique and ideal

and heroic images offered an original and romantic approach to photography that had its parallel in modern art.

The Secessionist Movement in Photography: P.H. Emerson, The Linked Ring and the American Pictorial Movement

P.H. Emerson must be acknowledged as the father of the Secessionist movement in photography. His books, essays and photographs inspired amateur and professional photographers to pursue new directions in photography. He encouraged photographers to go directly to nature and life, as modern painters were doing, and not mimic the pictorialism of academic genre photographs. More importantly, Emerson wanted to establish photography as a legitimate and independent art form. He concluded that photography was "superior to etching, woodcut or charcoal drawing because of its ability to accurately record fact; yet, because it lacked color, photography was second only to painting."¹⁴ Influenced by Emerson's ideas, many Victorian photographers began to question conventional photographic practices, institutions, and the status of photography as a fine art. They sought to free themselves and photography from the constraints of traditional photographic standards. These photographers were to be a part of the first secessionist movement in Late Victorian photography.

During the 1890's, photographers began to form organizations with specific artistic and aesthetic purposes. Founded in 1892, The Linked Ring Brotherhood was the most influential secessionist society in Late Victorian photography. Lead by George Davidson, the Brotherhood, which included Cameron's son H.H. Cameron, seceded from the official Photographic Society of London. As a secessionist group, the Brotherhood had one specific cause: the technical and artistic advancement of

photography as a fine art. In 1893, the group publicly defined the purpose of their society:

"The establishment of a distinct pictorial movement through the severance of this application of photography from the purely scientific and technical; and through the medium of independent exhibitions, its final universal recognition."¹⁵

In their effort to secure a place for photography as a fine art, The Linked Ring Brotherhood developed an aesthetic program that emphasized Truth, Beauty, and Imagination. The emblem of the the Linked Ring - three intertwined rings - symbolized these three idealistic concepts. The Brotherhood's program of Truth, Beauty and Imagination was modeled after the romantic idealism of Cameron, Emerson, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Like these artists, the Linked Ring photographers believed in a 'truth to nature', the ideal perception of beauty and the primacy of an artist's imaginative insight. They also adapted many of the technical methods of Cameron and Emerson into their photographic images. These methods included dramatic natural lighting techniques and differential focusing techniques. The work of Cameron and Emerson was an artistic and aesthetic source for the Linked Ring. From these photographers, the Brothers learned the importance of emotional and psychological interpretation in a photographic image, especially in portraits.

In defiance of the official London Photographic Society, the Linked Ring Brotherhood organized their own annual exhibitions which they called 'Salons.'¹⁶ They patterned their 'Salons' after the French Salons because the name "suggested through its application by the French to certain fine-art exhibitions of a distinctive and high class character."¹⁷ In their 'Salons,' the Linked Ring rejected the traditional manner of selecting and

hanging work. The selection process was overseen by a jury of photographers only and no medals were awarded.¹⁸ Interestingly, professional and amateur work was selected for these exhibitions. Photographs were hung assymmetrically at eye level, in a single row, rather than stacked in the traditional manner from floor to ceiling.

The Linked Ring exhibited their work as "The New Photography" and proclaimed that "on the pictorial side, chemistry, optics, and mechanism no longer predominate; they have become subservient and of secondary importance, very little knowledge of them indeed is in anyway necessary."¹⁹ In "The New Photography" of the Linked Ring, the mechanical and chemical processes of photography were considered the means, not the end, of photographic expression. These processes were the photographer's tools by which he could liberate photography from realistic and traditional representation. The Linked Ring Brothers considered themselves picture-makers, rather than picture-takers.

The Linked Ring eschewed the sharp focus and crisp detail of traditional academic photography. They prized any new method or new technology that helped to demonstrate that photographic images could, like paintings and the graphic arts, record the artist's hand and imaginative spirit. Thus, the Linked Ring promoted soft or differential focus a la Cameron and Emerson, reduction of pictorial detail and the use of new platinum papers for dark velvet tonal values. The introduction of new technology, like the gum-bichromate process, popularized in 1894, allowed the Links to manipulate, overlay, scratch and smudge the photographic image during the development. At last, according to the Linked Ring, photography could take its place alongside painting and the graphic arts because, like them, the artist's hand could be seen as an integral part of

the artistic process. Commenting on a portrait of himself by the 'Link' Frederick Evans, George Bernard Shaw reflected on the impact of the new technological processes:

"Compare them with the best work with pencil, crayon, brush, or silver-point you can find - with Holbein's finest Tutor drawings, with Rembrandt's 'Saskia', with Valesquez' 'Admiral', with anything you like - if you cannot see at a glance that the old game is up, that the camera has hopelessly beaten the pencil and the paintbrush as an instrument of artistic representation, then you will never make a true critic."²⁰

The artistic and aesthetic program of the Linked Ring Brotherhood was eagerly embraced by secessionist photographers around the world. In recognition of "The New Photography" outside of Great Britain, the Linked Ring Brothers accepted into their society those photographers whose work revealed imaginative subject matter, expressive methods and new printing techniques. Four American photographers, Alfred Stieglitz, F. Holland Day, Gertrude Kasebier and Clarence White, who were members of a group known as the pictorialists, were inducted as honorary 'Links'. The experimental and intellectual climate of the Linked Ring Brotherhood encouraged these American photographers to extend the photographic medium into the realm of dreams, inner emotions and the imagination.

In October of 1900, the American pictorialist F. Holland Day assembled a collection of American photographs for exhibition at the Royal Photographic Society formerly known as the Photographic Society of London. The exhibition, entitled the "New School of American Photography," included many of the important figures of American Pictorial Photography: Day, Kasebier, White and the young Edward Steichen. In the early decades of the twentieth century, these photographs would help to shape the development of the American Photo-

Secession and the Pictorial Photographer's of America Society. A critic for The London Times remarked that the American photographs rejected the "conventional photographic rendering of sharp detail and harsh contrast."²¹ The artistic and aesthetic sources of American Pictorial Photography can be traced to the photographic program of The Linked Ring and the portrait photographs of Cameron. Pictorialist photographers were also influenced by the most important art movement of the day - Symbolism. The romantic visual language of Symbolism, which was mysterious, metaphorical and spiritual, inspired pictorial photographers to visually externalize the illusive ideals of the human soul.

Cameron and her Influence on the American Pictorial Movement

In February, 1909, the International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography was on display at the National Arts Club in New York. The director of the show, T. Nilsen Laurik, assembled 255 works which documented the evolution and history of Pictorial Photography.

"I (Nilsen) would simply throw out the observation that the highest expression of the imagination and inventive genius of our time, especially of the best creative minds of America, is the machine in all its beautiful simplicity and co-ordinate complexity - in it we find our sonnets, our epics, and therein lies expressed eloquently the true greatness of our age."²²

In a special historical section of the exhibition, Laurik displayed the work of two British photographers who were considered predecessors of the American Pictorial Movement - Julia Margaret Cameron and David Octavius Hill.

As a forerunner of Pictorial Photography, Cameron was regarded as an artist-photographer by the American Pictorialists. In the light of the Pictorial Movement, her portrait photographs were seen as evidence of the

artistic and aesthetic merit of the photographic medium. Alfred Stieglitz, the founder of the American Photo-Secession and the leading advocate of art-photography, believed that Cameron was one of the most important 'pictorial' photographers of the Victorian era. In his 1913 January issue of Camera Work, Stieglitz published some of the portrait photographs by Cameron, along with four of his own photographs.²³ First published in 1905, Camera Work was the most influential photography magazine in America. For Stieglitz, Cameron's photo portraits demonstrated that personal values could be interjected into the experiential truth of the photograph. He published her photographs in Camera Work, in part, as a response to the growing popularity of the Kodak camera and its machine-made images:

"If you would rather art stay dead, then go out with your Kodak and produce some faithful imitations."²⁴

Two American pictorialists who were influenced by the portrait photographs of Cameron were Gertrude Kasebier and Edward Steichen. As leading exponents of the Photo-Secession, both photographers were devoted to advancing the cause of portrait photography, especially in a pictorial form. Eschewing the objective reality of 'straight' or 'pure' photography, Kasebier and Steichen were drawn to the romantic ideals and imagery of Symbolism. Historically, the artistic and aesthetic ideas of Pictorial Photography parallel those of Symbolist art. As pictorial photographers, both Kasebier and Steichen were preoccupied with allegorical and symbolic themes, the results of which celebrate beauty and the heroic. Their insistence on romantic themes is the strongest link between their art and the portrait photography of Cameron.

Like Cameron, Kasebier and Steichen sought to illustrate the spiritual and creative nature of a person. They favored photographic methods by which the subject could be made to render up the illusive ideals of the human soul. Often, both photographers employed a soft focus portrait lens, or uncorrected lenses to create a mysterious atmosphere that suggested a poetic and spiritual mood.²⁵ This type of photographic approach is indebted to the innovative methods that Cameron utilized in her portrait work. The portrait photography of Kasebier and Steichen was also affected by the romantic mood found in Symbolist art and poetry. From symbolist paintings, the pictorial photographers adapted the following compositional elements: 1) a flattening out of the picture plane to eliminate a sense of depth, and 2) a rhythmic and decorative treatment of the picture surface. Like their symbolist counterparts, Kasebier and Steichen had one primary aim - "to stimulate the imagination."²⁶ They combined expressive photographic methods with a symbolist mode of composition to suggest the romantic and symbolic content of a portrait. Through suggestion rather than denotation, Kasebier and Steichen encourage the imagination of the spectator to become part of the emotional and psychological world of a subject.

By the turn of the century, Cameron's portraits of beautiful women and famous men were well known in America. The expressive use of allegory and symbol found in her portraits of women inspired the pictorial photographer Gertrude Kasebier to explore the romantic themes of beauty and the sister arts.

Kasebier is acknowledged as the major portraitist of the Photo-Secession. Like Cameron, she wished to elevate the artistic standards of portrait photography by translating the principles of fine portrait

painting into the photographic medium. She selected simple, quiet poses and placed great emphasis on the arrangement of hands and the positioning of the head. Seeking to create photographs of equal importance to paintings, Kasebier employed photographic methods that produced a 'painterly' and poetic effect. Often, she included universally recognized symbols such as flowers, simple white dresses and long hair to give a symbolic and pictorial accent to the photographic image. The employment of allegory and symbol links the portrait photography of Kasebier to that of Cameron.

Advanced by Cameron in the Victorian era, the themes of beauty and the sister arts were popular and traditional subject matter in pictorial photography by the turn of the century. Kasebier further developed the modern and romantic content of these themes. She primarily depicted beautiful women and mothers and children in contemporary settings. For her, these depictions affirmed the spiritual and moral character of womanhood and motherhood.

In Blessed Art Thou Among Women (Figure 19) of 1899, Kasebier presents a double portrait of Frances Lee and her daughter. Although a contemporary subject, the title of this portrait suggests a religious message. As in Cameron's In the Garden, the written word and visual image are symbolically united in this picture to convey a romantic and spiritual meaning. The title of this portrait can be found in the work itself; in the frame of the painting depicting The Annunciation hanging on the wall. Taken from the gospel of Luke, line 1:28, the title suggests the sacredness of motherhood. Also, in a symbolic mode, the long white dress worn by Frances Lee represents the holiness of a woman's life. Through the incorporation of symbolic imagery and biblical verse, Kasebier



Figure 19

Gertrude Kasebier. Blessed Art Thou Among Women. 1898.

suggests a religious, and more specifically, a Christian message. Yet this message is implied, rather than overtly defined. More importantly, this picture deals with the universal issue of motherhood. Within a contemporary setting, Kasebier isolates her subjects and presents through expression, pose and gesture, the character and beauty of her subjects. By exploring the theme of beauty and the sister arts, Kasebier produces an image that attempts to combine the reality of the modern secular world with the ideal values of an inner spiritual world.

This pictorial portrait reveals Kasebier's instinctual approach to photographic methods and compositional design. Like Cameron, she renounced the retouching of the photographic image. "Wrinkles, freckles," she said, "all have to show if they are in the original."²⁷ To achieve a harmonious and beautiful portrait, Kasebier emphasized soft and low-keyed tones. In Blessed Art Thou Among Women, the evenness of natural light which falls into the room contributes to the harmonious relationship of subdued tonal values. In addition, Kasebier utilizes a soft focus to unify the broad areas of white with the rhythmic pictorial forms. The soft focus and harmonious relationship of form and tone found in this portrait illustrates Kasebier's instinctual and imaginative employment of formal compositional elements and expressive photographic methods. Like Cameron, she preferred those devices which beautified the photographic portrait.

At the age of twenty-one, Edward Steichen was one of the foremost representatives of the American Pictorial School of Photography. He sought the advancement and acceptance of photography as a fine art. He stated: "I was intrigued with the possibility of producing by photography a picture as good as one that could be done in any other way."²⁸ Notably,

Steichen was not only an innovative photographer by a painter as well. His ability to work in two mediums was advantageous to his position as a leader of the Pictorial Movement. In comparing the roles of photographer and painter, Steichen wrote:

"if the photographer is desirous of being an artist, his work shall communicate the spirit of the painter."²⁹

From the beginning of his photographic career, Steichen was interested in portrait photography. He sought to fuse together in his portraits his knowledge of photographic science and painting techniques. By combining these two elements, he attempted to produce portraits equal in importance to fine portrait paintings. Steichen's portrait photographs fall into two categories: first, portraits of great men, who represent the embodiment of genius and second, portraits of women, who symbolically represent ideal beauty.

In 1900, while working in France and England, Steichen embarked on a series of portraits he called "Great Men."³⁰ He looked to Victorian portraits of great men, for technical and artistic inspiration. In Cameron's work, Steichen realized he had found an artist whose aesthetic interpretation was similar to his own. Consequently, he adapted into his photographic work many of Cameron's stylistic innovations. Like Cameron, Steichen viewed portraits of great men, especially artists and writers, as representations of genius and the heroic ideal.

Steichen's 'Great Men' series included portraits of Rodin, Maeterlinck, Lenbuck, and George Frederick Watts, the Victorian portrait artist (Figure 20). In his portrait series, Steichen not only attempted to emulate the photo portraits of Cameron, but the portrait paintings of



Figure 20

Edward Steichen. George Frederick Watts. 1901.

Watts as well. The photographer's attitude toward his work, and his purpose was shaped by the importance he gave to Watts's ideas and paintings.

By the turn of the century, Watts's portrait paintings were regarded as symbolic art by fin-de-siecle artists and photographers, including Steichen. Watts held that intellectual and creative men were the embodiment of genius and the heroic. In G.F. Watts, of 1901, Steichen demonstrated his knowledge of Victorian art and philosophy and his skillful use of new photographic techniques. Watts's noble and heroic character is Steichen's idea of the artist as inspired genius.

The link between the photography of Steichen and Cameron can be found in their portrait photographs of G.F. Watts. Both of these pictures illustrate a romantic and symbolic theme: to explore the spiritual and noble nature of a master artist. In each work, the pose is similar; Watts is seated, his hands resting on his lap, his head turned in profile. The facial expression of Watts, his eyes slightly closed, reflects a mood of contemplation. This mood is heightened in each work by the dark and mysterious air which surrounds the painter. Like Cameron, Steichen brought his subject up close to the picture plane, concentrating on his head and hands, and eliminating any compositional elements that imply depth. Influenced by symbolist paintings, Steichen emphasizes a simplicity and harmony of the surface plane and forms by limiting the value gradation to a few dark tones.

Looking to Cameron as an artistic model, Steichen sought to incorporate 'painterly' effects into his portraits. So, like Cameron, he used the expressive devices of a soft focus and strong direct light to convey a visual expression of the painter's creative genius.

Interestingly, Steichen even went so far as to extend the photographic portrait into the realm of painting. Employing a manipulative photographic process known as gum-bichromate printing, he worked directly on the surface of the photograph with a brush. The gum-bichromate process allowed him to control and shape the development of the image, manual as well as chemically. This process enabled Steichen to achieve a dramatic 'painterly' effect.

The pictorial photographs of Steichen and Kasebier owe much to the influence of Cameron. Her devotion to the expression of her subjects and her innovative handling of the photographic medium inspired American photographers to infuse their pictorial style with a romantic importance and an expressive spirit. The American pictorialists wanted to establish a new modern idealism by producing ideal and heroic portraits.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Julia Margaret Cameron's stature as one of the greatest figures of the Victorian era has grown steadily since her death in 1879. She brought a new vitality to Victorian photography. When she took up photography in 1863, at the age of 48, her artistic vision was already conditioned by the idealistic teachings of Carlyle and Ruskin and the romantic interests by Watts and the Pre-Raphaelites. Great Britain was in her infancy in photographic appreciation during the Victorian period. Photographic societies and clubs were founded by persons who thought of photography as an academic or scientific medium. Cameron determined to demonstrate that photography had true artistic merit. She was the first photographer to attempt to create ideal or heroic images. Her innovative technique and personal expression expanded the scope of photography. By these means, Cameron elevated the stature of portrait photography from a commercial medium to an art form. She set a high standard of quality for herself and for other artists. Cameron transformed the British photographic scene with these contributions: first, she emphasized photographic and compositional devices that make artistic prints and, second, that meaningful portraits demonstrate true personal expression.

Although her reputation rests on her portrait photography of the

1860's, Cameron in 1871 began to illustrate the poetry of Tennyson, in particular his poems "The Idylls of the King" and "The Lady of Shallott." She demonstrated that with poetic associations, photographs took on new forms of expression. Her innovations in photography offered a new compositional approach that had its parallel in the romantic art and poetry of the modern age. Cameron's photographs of great men and beautiful women provide a record of a pioneering artist as well as a view of the emergence of a modern idealism in Victorian art.

In nineteenth century photography and painting, the romantic images of heroic character and ideal beauty enabled artists to create poetic and uniquely personal works. These images and their symbolic power had Cameron to establish a new relationship between art and Victorian life. In her portraits of great men, Cameron photographed many of the giants of Victorian art and literature. The photographer viewed portraits of great men, especially artists and poets, as representations of genius and the heroic ideal. Like Thomas Carlyle, she believed that it was the 'inspired' genius who, by virtue of his moral and spiritual vision, helped to shape the social values of Victorian life and society. The deeds and achievements of these visionary men were seen by Cameron as symbolic of God's will working on earth. Those individuals who exemplified the Carlylean ideal were men of her own day. They were modern heroes for a modern secular world. Cameron's portraits of great men reflected a new attitude in Victorian society for the incorporation of moral and spiritual values into art and life. In her portraits, the photographer revealed the living character of important men as well as the immediate reality of their inner moral and creative spirit.

As in the portraits of great men, Cameron's photographs of beautiful

women explore the relationship between life's realistic and the ideal world of the human soul. In these pictures, the photographer celebrates the theme of ideal beauty. Influenced by John Ruskin's theories of the sister arts and beauty, Cameron perceived beauty as representational of an inner ideal. For her, visual beauty was an outward reflection of the more vital and spiritual self. Like the heroic pictures of great men, the photographs of women can be read as portraits or symbolic characterizations. The meaning of Cameron's portraits lies somewhere between photographic fact and symbolic representation. The portraits of beautiful women are unique because they introduce a new association between romantic poetry and symbolic imagery. Cameron recognized that portrait photographs could visually express a poetic content similar to that exhibited in contemporary paintings, in particular, those of Watts and the Pre-Raphaelites. In this way the photographer sought to align her photographs to fine art and elevate the artistic standards of portrait photography.

Cameron based her image of ideal beauty on living women who exhibited a melancholy and soulful expression. Throughout the portraits of beautiful women, the photographer chose a specific type of model with flowing hair, a long face, and dark, reflective eyes. Symbolic motifs, such as flowers and a long white dress, are poetic images which are frequently found in Cameron's photographs. The soulful features of the model and the symbolic motifs represent an expression of ideal beauty. Often, the photographer attached poetic titles and epitaphs to her portraits. The alliance between romantic poetry, symbolic imagery, and the physical character of living subjects emphasizes the close relationship between art and modern life. Cameron's portraits of

beautiful women reveal the importance of beauty as a reflection of moral and spiritual truths. The images of ideal beauty and the heroic genius in Cameron's portrait photography represents a romantic revival of past ideals, moral and spiritual ideals that would be incorporated into a modern secular society.

In her role as a photographer, Cameron viewed herself as a visionary poet. Like a Carlylean hero, she, as an artist, possessed a spiritual insight based on personal feeling, intuition and experience. She believed that photography should educate and ennoble its audience. For her, the photographic medium was not a mere mechanical and chemical craft but an intellectual discipline. Through emotional and psychological interpretation, Cameron attempted to prove that a portrait photograph was not only an invaluable document of modern life but a work of true art.

As an advocate of photography as an art form, Cameron influenced the direction of photography in Great Britain and America. She believed that she had a mission to beautify and advance photography; she carried out this mission with a crusading fervor. Secessionist societies like the Link Ring and the American Pictorialists of the Photo-Secession were inspired by the message of Cameron's art advocacy: the artistic and technical advancement of photography, especially portrait photography. In addition, many British photographers and American pictorial photographers looked to the photographs of Cameron for a mature and perfected aesthetic that could be translated into their photographic images.

Within a year of taking up photography, Cameron was showing her photographs in galleries and in juried exhibitions. Her desire to exhibit was due not only to personal ambition, but also because she was determined to advance portrait photography as an art form. She thought that portrait

photography was a truthful expression of mankind. This view was so persuasive that her photo portraits were reproduced in the most influential photographic publications of the Victorian age and in American magazines, like Camera Work, in the early twentieth century. Cameron's portrait photographs have also been the subject of major exhibitions in Great Britain and America. Most recently in 1985, an exhibition of her photographs traveled throughout America and Europe.

Julia Margaret Cameron's contributions to portrait photography revolutionized the photographer medium. Her photographs influenced photographers in her own day and in subsequent decades. In her photographs, Cameron sought to combine the real with the ideal. Thus, portrait photography, in her hands, becomes a unique method of self-expression, creating works of fine art.

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES

Introduction: Cameron and the Portrait

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FOOTNOTES

Chapter One: The Formative Years

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⁵Hill, Julia Margaret Cameron: A Victorian Family Portrait, p. 100.

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¹⁷Maas, Victorian Painters, p. 124.

¹⁸Gernsheim, Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work, p. 14

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³Brian Hill, Julia Margaret Cameron: A Victorian Family Portrait, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 126.

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⁶Ibid., p. 70.

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Ideal Beauty and Poetic Symbolism

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⁷Stephen Spender, Pre-Raphaelitism: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 120.

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- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 124.
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