

A Semiological Reading of Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Other Poems and Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographic Illustrations

Alfred Tennyson'ın *Idylls of the King and Other Poems* Kitabı ve Julia Margaret Cameron'ın Fotoğrafları Üzerine Göstergibilimsel Bir Okuma

Mehmet Ali Çelikel  0000-0003-0402-9858
Marmara University

ABSTRACT

Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King and Other Poems* connects poetry with photographic illustrations by Julia Margaret Cameron. The book is one of the pioneering examples of illustrated poetry. Cameron had her friends and family members dressed in medieval clothes to pose for her and photographed them for Tennyson's epic. However, when she willingly accepted Tennyson's request to illustrate his poetry book with photographs, she did not envisage how her photographs would look reduced in scale in a poetry book. Then she had them reprinted in a deluxe edition to increase the effect of poetry through her photographic illustrations. In time, her portraits of family and friends reached a level of not only illustrating Tennyson's poems but also passing over the influence of poetry. Cameron's photographs, despite the technological difficulties of her age in printing photography, reflected the themes and characters of Tennyson's poems to carry their meanings further. This article discusses and analyses, from the semiological point of view, the contribution of the art of photography to poetry.

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Introduction

Poetry is a verbal art. It does not, in the first instance, present itself as something imagery. It has got a philosophical exquisiteness derived from what poets seek to convey by composing their words in a lyrical pattern. As one of the most prominent and celebrated forms of verbal art, poetry, then, stands out as a powerful form of writing that captures the complex and multidimensional nature of human experiences and emotions through beautiful language, recognized as a vital and dynamic form of literary expression across cultures. If, as Christopher Ricks argues, "nothing is more important than being able to hear the rhythms and cadences of a poem," (1999: xxxix) there may occur controversies between the appreciator's image of the poem and the images envisaged by the poets. Although poetry may be said to be graphic at times in terms of its organization of the lines and stanzas in a certain shape that may contribute to the meaning, the meaning is still obliged to be limited within the readers' imaginary power. Poetry relies on the verbal meaning that always goes beyond the lexical meaning of the words in lines. Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King and Other Poems*, first published in 1896, is a rare example that connects poetry with photographic illustrations by Julia Margaret Cameron. The book is one of the pioneering examples of illustrated poetry.

CONTACT Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Prof. Dr., Dept. of English Language and Literature, Marmara University, Türkiye | mehmet.celikel@marmara.edu.tr; ORCID# 0000-0003-0402-9858; <https://doi.org/10.47777/cankujhss.1496337>

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Idylls of the King is a collection of narrative poems which recount the legendary tale of King Arthur and the Knight of the Round Table. These poems were written over a period of many years until they could be published in a volume in 1859. Alfred Tennyson's narration of the Arthurian legends is renowned for its rich imagery, exploration of the themes of chivalry and honor together with its Victorian sensitivity. This collection consists of twelve narrative poems, including "The Coming of Arthur", "The Holy Grail", and "The Passing of Arthur". The poetic style of Tennyson can be identified by its musical quality, lively descriptions and its emotional depth. His works reflect the fascination with medievalism and the idealization of chivalry in the Victorian period.

The structure and composition of the poems fall into the category of epic poems comprising of twelve interconnected narrative poems each of which tell a different episode or aspect of the Arthurian Legend. In its chronological sequence, Tennyson centres on the themes of chivalry, nobility and honor that are associated with the Arthurian Legend. The Knights of the round table are portrayed as noble warriors guided by a code of conduct. Tennyson also explores the conflict between good and evil in this work. The narrative is often eclipsed by moral struggles and conflicts between the characters like King Arthur and Sir Mordred.

Tennyson described Arthur as a noble and just king who attempts to create a utopian society based on the principles of justice and chivalry. Yet, his idealism faces challenges, and the narrative reflects on the difficulties of maintaining such ideals in the face of human frailty. The complex relationships among Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot contribute to the tragedy of the story. Tennyson revolves around the themes of love, betrayal and the destructive consequences of personal desires conflicting with the ideals of the Round Table. The poems certainly involve some symbolism and allegory. The quest for the grail serves as a central motif that represents the quest for spiritual enlightenment, purity and the divine. It also becomes a symbol of the unattainable ideal, emphasizing the flaws and limitations of humanity. Camelot, on the other hand, symbolizes the utopian vision of Arthur's kingdom, a place of glorified ideas. The fall of Camelot mirrors the broader decline of the Arthurian world.

Certainly, *Idylls of the King* reflects all the Victorian values, including medievalism, with which the Victorians were fascinated. Medievalism, as William J. Diebold argues, is a "peripheral study of medieval art history and visual culture" by discussing how medievalism contributes to contemporary art and literature (247). For Diebold, medievalism is best defined as "the reception of the Middle Ages" which equates medievalism with "reception of history" (249). David Mathews, on the other hand, states that medievalism does not only refer to a period in the past "but to a mindset and an ideology in the present" and this mindset refers to "those who would resist the march of modernity" as well as indicating "conservatism" and "nostalgia" (696). In accordance with what Mathews called as "a mindset"; William E. Buckler had coined "Tennysonian Medievalism" that complies with the "general rubric of 'Victorian Medievalism'" which is a suitable way in which "Tennyson saw matters" differently from how "his contemporaries saw them" by individually creating a "distinctive structural model", "a persona undergoing the jeopardy of process" (85).

This fascination with medievalism allowed the Victorians to explore moral and ethical questions within the context of an imagined, idealized past. Through the lens of Arthurian legend, Tennyson delves into timeless themes of chivalry, honor, and nobility, presenting them as ideals to which society should aspire. By doing so, he invites his readers to reflect on their own time, contrasting the perceived purity and simplicity of the past with the complexities of the present. Moreover, Tennyson employs social criticism in his work, using the narrative to subtly address contemporary issues. One of the critical aspects of his social commentary is the changing role of women in Victorian society. Tennyson's portrayal of female characters, such as Guinevere and Elaine, reflects the struggles and expectations placed upon women, highlighting both their strength and their

suffering within a patriarchal framework. This commentary aligns with the broader Victorian debate about women's rights and their place in society. In addition to gender issues, Tennyson's work also touches on the impacts of industrialization. The rapid industrial growth of the Victorian era brought about significant social and economic changes, leading to both progress and disruption. Tennyson's depiction of Camelot as a once-great kingdom now facing decay and corruption can be seen as a metaphor for the challenges of maintaining traditional values and social cohesion in the face of modern industrial forces. Furthermore, *Idylls of the King* grapples with the challenge of upholding traditional values in a rapidly evolving world. The tension between the noble ideals of King Arthur's court and the moral ambiguities faced by its members reflects the Victorian struggle to reconcile a romanticized past with the realities of contemporary life. Through characters' failures and triumphs, Tennyson critiques the notion that merely looking back to a golden age can provide simple solutions to modern problems. Overall, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is not just a nostalgic homage to medieval times but a complex work that engages with Victorian societal issues. By weaving together medievalism and social criticism, Tennyson offers a nuanced perspective on the values and challenges of his time, encouraging readers to consider the ways in which history, tradition, and progress intersect.

Among literary studies on Tennyson, from 1990s to date, Noelle Bowles focuses on how Tennyson "linked faith specifically with Anglicanism and the conservative order of church and state" and discusses the poet encourages the "nineteenth century readers to conclude" that the political and religious traditions of England were still viable in their age (589). In another example, Ian McGuire reads *Idylls of the King* from an epistemological perspective and argues that the failures of "psychological and epistemological" forms of "sublimation" cause "the basic fragility of the larger structure of capitalism imperialism" in the nineteenth century (398). Margaret Linley, on the other hand, reads and problematizes the "nationality and sexuality" that arises "out of the ideological disruptions" in Tennyson's work (365). Linley argues that Tennyson "retrieves value and virility for his domesticated, emasculated gentleman by virtually locking actual women out of his house" by challenging the bourgeois ideology (380). This present study, instead, reads and analyses the power of photography in creating new meanings and dimensions in Tennyson's poetry rather than dealing with nationalism, relationship between church and state, psychological and epistemological sublimations or the connection between nationality and sexuality. This paper focuses on the relationship between literature and semiotics through photographs.

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, which is described by Harold Bloom as "an attempt to renovate an archaism in the modern age" (89), is renowned for its rich imagery and symbolism, which serve to deepen both the emotional and thematic resonance of the narrative. Tennyson "provides such a synchronicity, highlighting *Idylls of the King* as an example of the unnatural delineation of character" creating a kind of dramatization that presents his natural "lyrical gifts, rather than when they are forced by the tale he attempts to tell" (Bloom 89). He employs lively and evocative images that draw on elements of nature, myths, and archetypal symbolism, thereby enhancing the reader's engagement and understanding. Bloom, quoting from Arthur Henry Hallam, points out Tennyson's five distinctive characteristics in his poetry: "the control of a luxuriant imagination"; "accuracy of adjustment" in characters' moods; "skill in emotionally fusing a vivid, 'picturesque' portrayal of objects; and "mellow soberness of tone" (xiii).

Tennyson often uses natural imagery, such as the changing seasons, to mirror the internal states of his characters or the shifting fortunes of Camelot. This not only brings the story to life but also creates a layered narrative where the environment reflects the human condition. The use of mythological and symbolic references further enriches the text. Tennyson draws from a well of Arthurian legends, infusing his poetry with symbols like the Holy Grail, Excalibur, and the Round

Table, each carrying significant connotations. These symbols are not mere decorations but integral to the unfolding of the plot and the development of themes such as purity, loyalty, and the quest for spiritual and moral perfection. For instance, the Holy Grail quest represents not just a physical journey but a spiritual odyssey, highlighting the characters' inner struggles and aspirations.

Additionally, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is distinguished by its musicality. The poet's use of musical language and rhythmic patterns significantly contributes to the overall aesthetic experience of the work. The rhythmic flow and melodic qualities of Tennyson's verse create a sense of harmony and beauty, enhancing the reader's immersion in the text. The careful attention to meter and sound evokes an almost hypnotic effect, drawing readers into the lyrical and mythic world of Camelot. This musicality also serves a thematic purpose, reflecting the balance and order that King Arthur seeks to impose upon his kingdom, as well as the dissonance that arises when these ideals are threatened. The interplay of rhythm and sound mirrors the tensions and resolutions within the narrative, adding another layer of meaning to the poem. As Ayşe Çelikkol notes, there is an elaborated link between music and spontaneity in the pre-Arthurian world and Tennyson's poem provides, in Çelikkol's words, "a sophisticated commentary on the affective and political functions of music" though this link (239). It should particularly be noted that "instrumental and vocal music could strengthen the sense of national belonging" (Çelikkol 239).

Olivia Loksing Moy studies the poem on a more linguistic level and considers it as a text characterized by "the stagnancy and slow deterioration of its characters" when it presents "poetic movements of symmetry and recursion, of retrospection and return", because the language of the poem, according to Moy, often features "circles and repetition" at a poetic level (268). This linguistic level justifies the relationship between Tennyson's poetry and semiological representation. To a certain extent, poetry relies on linguistic symmetry, chiasmus and grammatical plays as in photography's plays on light, perspective and symmetrical and asymmetrical representations of the subjects. Simon Cooke regards Tennyson's encodement of "the characters' serenity" in an elaborated language of "peaceful landscapes, rustic villages, framing trees of a recognizably English variety" as his "semiotics of the English idyll" (74). It is quite intriguing to see the parallelism between this present paper and Leonée Ormond's argument that emphasizes Tennyson's poetry as having a narrative form that foregrounds "a strong moral code" and "some of the most decorative" poems "with their extended epic" (114). She also points out the fact that very few poets "retain their lyric gifts beyond early middle age, and, after he reached fifty, Tennyson's poetry tended towards narrative or exposition" (147).

Thus, *Idylls of the King* remains a significant work in the Victorian literary canon, not only for its exploration of timeless themes but also for its representation of the complexities of human nature, morality, and social ideals. Tennyson's masterful use of imagery, symbolism, and musicality makes the work a profound meditation on the human experience. It addresses the eternal struggles between idealism and reality, order and chaos, and tradition and change. By encapsulating these universal concerns within the framework of Arthurian legend, Tennyson ensures that *Idylls of the King* continues to resonate with readers, offering insights into both the Victorian era and the broader human condition.

Cameron's Photography

Julia Margaret Cameron, who took photographs for Tennyson's poetry, was one of the earliest British photographers. She was active in the mid-19th century, around the same time as Tennyson. She is mostly known for her striking portraits and her use of short focus, which was quite unconventional for such an early period of the art of photography. Cameron was a friend of Tennyson and due to their friendship she produced a series of photographic illustrations for his *Idylls of the King*. She was born in Calcutta in 1815, and she was one of the six daughters of "the

Bengal civil servant James Pattle” as Charles W. Millard relates (187). In 1839, she married Charles Hay Cameron, and settled at Freshwater Bays on the Isle of Wight where she “moved in a circle that included Tennyson, Darwin, Carlyle, Browning, Ellen Terry, Sir John Herschel, and George Frederick Watts, all of whom she was to photograph” (Millard 187). Millard points out that she was “reportedly first given a camera by her daughter in 1863, on her 48th birthday” (187). As she was interested in amateur theatricals, her art of photography was influenced by her interest and thus she was “tender and demanding in her dealings with those she directed and photographed” (Millard 187). As a result of her talent and interest in creating *mise-en-scène*’s, Tennyson requested her to “create some illustrations to the *Idylls of the King* for the “People’s” (or Cabinet) edition of his works in preparation by Henry S. King and Co.” (188).

Cameron’s illustrations for Alfred Tennyson’s work were created between 1874 and 1875. The photographs depicted scenes and characters from *Idylls of the King* and brings his poetry to life through photographs. Cameron’s unique and artistic approach to portraits is visible in these images that she created for Tennyson’s poems, since she searches for possibilities of capturing emotional and symbolic essence of Tennyson’s narrative. It is important to note that she was not the only artist who illustrated Tennyson’s poetry. Gustave Doré, who was born in 1832, produced wood-engraved illustrations, for which he gained worldwide reputation, on Tennyson’s poems (Doré 7). Yet, the photographic illusions by Cameron reinforce the semantic influence of the poems by strongly emphasizing the *mise-en-scène* semiologically.

When Tennyson’s poems and Cameron’s photographs come together, they represent a convergence of literature and visual art that highlights the spirit of the Victorian era when particularly Tennyson’s intellectual circle was involved with medievalism. This union showcases the efforts of artists to explore and interpret shared themes, enriching the cultural tapestry of their time. Tennyson and Cameron’s collaborative works exemplify how different artistic mediums can complement and enhance each other, creating a more profound and multidimensional experience for the audience. Tennyson, with his evocative poetry, and Cameron, with her pioneering photographic techniques, each brought a unique perspective to their artistic endeavors. Tennyson’s poetry, rich with imagery, symbolism, and rhythmic beauty, found a visual counterpart in Cameron’s photographs, which often depicted scenes and characters from Tennyson’s works. Cameron’s photographs provided a visual representation that brought Tennyson’s words to life, allowing readers to see the poetic imagery in a tangible form. Beverly Taylor points out Tennyson’s argument that “art should focus on characters” in the same way as painting when he remarks to Millais saying that “if you have human beings before a wall, the wall ought to be picturesquely painted” (60). The images’ powerful impact on the meaning by light and picaresque setting is particularly dealt with here to distinguish this work from the earlier studies that usually focus on Medievalism in illustrations.

This interplay between text and image enabled a deeper understanding and appreciation of the themes and emotions embedded in Tennyson’s poems. Both Tennyson and Cameron played crucial roles in shaping the cultural and artistic landscape of the Victorian era. Tennyson, as the Poet Laureate, was a leading literary figure whose works were widely read and admired. His exploration of themes such as chivalry, honor, love, and loss resonated deeply with the Victorian public. Cameron, on the other hand, was a trailblazer in photography, transforming it from a mere mechanical process into a true art form. Her innovative use of soft focus and dramatic lighting, as well as her ability to capture the essence of her subjects, marked a significant departure from the rigid and formal style of early photography.

Their collaboration is a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of Victorian artistic endeavors which included joint artistic productions such as those of Doré’s illustrations for Tennyson’s poems. It reflects a period when Tennyson sought to break down the boundaries between different

forms of expression, believing that literature, visual art, and other mediums could inform and elevate one another. This synergy is evident in how Cameron's photographs not only illustrated Tennyson's texts but also interpreted and added new dimensions to his themes. Her images of characters like King Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Galahad provided a visual narrative that complemented and expanded upon Tennyson's poetic vision. Furthermore, the partnership between Tennyson and Cameron highlights the Victorian era's broader cultural movements, such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which emphasized a return to detail, vibrant colors, and complex compositions in both painting and literature. These movements were characterized by a deep appreciation for the past and a desire to infuse contemporary works with a sense of historical and emotional depth. Tennyson and Cameron, through their respective arts, embodied these ideals and contributed significantly to the Victorian aesthetic.

Julia Margaret Cameron had her friends and family members dressed in medieval clothes to pose for her and photographed them for Tennyson's epic. However, when she willingly accepted Tennyson's request to illustrate his poetry book with photographs, she did not envisage how her photographs would look reduced in scale in a poetry book. Then she had them reprinted in a deluxe edition to increase the effect of poetry through her photographic illustrations. In time, her portraits of family and friends reached a level of not only illustrating Tennyson's poems but also passing over the influence of poetry. Cameron's photographs, despite the technological difficulties of her age in printing photography, reflected the themes and characters of Tennyson's poems to carry their meanings further. Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs invite powerful analyses in connection with Tennyson's poetry from the semiological and narratological perspective and raise questions whether or not the themes and content of poetry could be enhanced by photographic images.

Narratology and Semiology

From the narratological perspective, Cameron's images turned poetry into a visible entry. Since narratology is traditionally accepted, as Monica Fludernik explains, to be a "sub-discipline of the study of literature" (9) with strong connections to poetics and to the semiotics, Cameron's contribution to Tennyson's poetry is open to semiological analyses as well. He not only employed poetic symbolism but also experimented lively descriptions that would help his readers to visualize what they were reading. Hence, a narratological reading appears to be a rather relevant way of reading *Idylls*. As in very well-known definition of John Berger, if "seeing comes before words" (Berger 7); narratology, in Fludernik's approach, is an analytic method that "resembles semiotics in so far as it analyses the constitution" of meaning in texts and contexts such as films or conversational narratives (Fludernik 9).

According to John Berger, an image is a "recreated or reproduced" sight, it is "an appearance, or a set of appearances" detached from "the place and time" where and when it first appeared (9). In Berger's views, the invention of the camera changed the way people saw and the visible "came to mean something different to them" (22). The semiological signs, according to Roland Barthes, let us "foresee the nature of the semiological sign in relation to the linguistics sign" and they consist of "signifier and a signified" with many semiological systems such as objects, gestures, pictorial images (41). Semiotics, therefore, as Daniel Chandler confirms, is a study of "visual signs" that help us comment on "drawings, paintings and photographs" (1-2). It involves not only studying the "signs in everyday speech", but also studying "everything that stands for something else", which means "signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects" (Chandler 2). The meaning of a sign does not present its relationship to other signs linguistically but it rather indicates the social context of its use (Chandler 9). A solely "text-based approach" to narrativity, on the other hand, puts aside "interesting issues," according to Fludernik, related to "its production, circulation and reception" (19). Therefore, a context "should be taken into account

when interpreting texts, particularly if the aim is an ideological or gender-specific reading" (Fludernik 20). For this reason, it is important to consider semiotic signs that support the context.

Adera Scheinker posits that the photographs created by Cameron for Tennyson's poems may be viewed as forms of "tableaux vivant" (34). Tableau vivant was a "popular Victorian parlor entertainment" and Cameron was renowned at that time to organize such events in the garden of her home (Scheinker 34). This form of entertainment included ornamental costumes to "recreate a theatrical setting" in which each participant was "positioned in a pose" that illustrated "a climactic moment in a particular literary scene" (Scheinker 34). When the required position was maintained, the participants froze in their positions for a few second to "allow the audience to admire the dramatic presentation" as Scheinker says (34). By this way, the players became a part of a living picture, or in other words a tableau vivant. Cameron's photographs are close examples of tableau vivant culture and they represent more than what conventional book illustrations show. Despite the fact that her photographs "are related to the text," in Scheinker's point of view, they are placed next to "excerpts from the poem" instead of being "inserted in to the full textual model" (35). Therefore, there is isolation between the images and the words and Cameron did not only attempt to "insert her images into Tennyson's already existing text structure", but instead of that she took out some framed fragments of the poems and put the next to her images to reproduce them (Scheinker 35). Yet, by doing so, she created another album of her photographs by adding some of Tennyson's lines next to the photographs and thus isolated her art from Tennyson's full text. Same as a tableau vivant that isolates "a moment in literature from the entire work" of literature, Cameron's volume also isolates the moments in tableau vivant from Tennyson's poem (Scheinker 35). In many Victorian novels, as Fludernik points out, "pars pro toto locutions are used extensively to identify characters: the man with the silken shirt, the boy in the red hat" which inevitably generates narrative tropes like "synecdoche and metonymy" that inherently constitute "a major role" in the introduction of the actors "in a narrative since they offer access to the social, spatial and visual contexts of the story" (44).

The utilization of props in this book is not solely attributed to Cameron. Tennyson also employed artifice to enrich his borrowed text. When crafting the *Idylls*, Tennyson situated Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century legend within the Victorian cultural framework. By doing so, he rendered the legend acceptable to his contemporaries by emphasizing sin as the downfall of noble ideals. Tennyson refrains from fully embracing the fantasy by subtly incorporating modern elements. This results in a captivating interplay of appropriation and artifice throughout this work. Scheinker considers this focus "on a woman's power and knowledge" and asserts that the "overt artifice" that Cameron reveals is significant as it alerts "the seemingly subversive notion of the female appropriating knowledge from the male" (36).

The use of props and clearly orchestrated staging evokes the innocent, playful quality of the photograph, reminiscent of a tableau vivant. Cameron achieves this by situating the scene within the traditionally feminine domain of the tableau vivant. Similar to the female character in Eliot's narrative, Cameron operates within the confines of the socially acceptable space allotted to nineteenth-century women of her social class. Instead of making a bold statement about Vivien, Cameron engages with her as a director orchestrating a static tableau vivant, distancing herself from any implication as a portrayal of the villainous Vivien. Consequently, Cameron's adaptation of Tennyson's tale poses no threat; rather, it serves as a harmless reimagining of the story within the limited artistic vocabulary available to women, remaining safely within the realm of femininity. Scheinker argues that the artifice serves, at the same time, "a secondary purpose", that reminds the viewer of the unreal quality of the scene (36). Adera Scheinker also argues that it is "this same quality" exaggerated by Tennyson's artifices. Both Cameron and Tennyson use artifice to appeal to Victorian sensibilities. Cameron's circle of friends, like many Victorians, romanticized the

preindustrial past but were often unwilling to relinquish the technological advances on which they had learned to rely. They frequently viewed the middle ages through the structures of their industrialized world. As Eliot explained, an imitation may have more success than the original. Hence, the artifices present in this volume could have served a dual purpose for Cameron. They may have soothed Victorian viewers who preferred to view medievalism through an obviously artificial lens. Simultaneously, these elements could detach Cameron from affiliations with the evil Vivien. Cameron is able to offset the tangled hair, the white robes of knowledge, and the charged finger with fractured action, obvious props and tableau vivant artifice. Through these devices, Cameron controls the fantasy. In this way, the middle ages can be viewed from a safe distance. Simultaneously, Cameron asserts her position within the space allowed to Victorian women (Scheinker 36).

Fludernik suggests that within the narratives of novels and conversations, the concept of perspective, or in other terms the point of view and focalization, stands out as a metaphor (114). The reader visualizes events from the point of view of a character in a novel. In actual fact, though, the reader only sees letters on the page. Therefore metaphor of sight and seeing becomes the intentions of conveying the mimetic illusion achieved by the narrative technique (Fludernik 114). In the scene depicting the encounter of Vivien and Merlin, Cameron uses as models her husband Charles Hay and an unknown woman referred to as a lady who visits Freshwater¹ (See Image 1):

For Merlin, over talk'd and overwork;
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead.
And lost to life and use and name and fame. (Line 963-969)

Cameron's use of blurred images create a dream-like reality which reflects Tennyson's legendary style. In semiotics, suggests Fludernik, "we distinguish between three kinds of signs: deictic, iconic and symbolic" (102). As the image above suggests, iconic appearance of Merlin as a long, white-bearded man also symbolizes the deictic appearance of legendary heroes. In this part, Vivien follows the wise magician Merlin into the woods, and according to Scheinker, begins loving the elderly man in "an attempt to convince him to teach her an incantation" (34). In this image, Vivien freezes while she is preparing to put a spell on Merlin. The photographs blurred, dark and misty visualization of the characters reflect Tennyson's legendary mythification and idolization of Merlin. Particularly the use of pointing finger toward the forehead seems to be a striking image of "putting a spell". It should also be pointed out that these powerful photographs are designed not only as photographic images of the people, but also photographic images of poetic lines. Thus, the upright woman in white and solemn and dignified stance of a white-bearded male figure are not coincidental, as they exemplify an artistic and conscientious study by Cameron in order to increase the poetic effect.

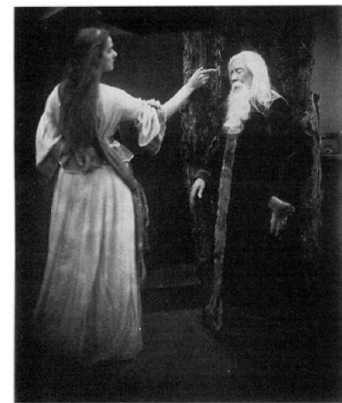


Image 1: Cox & Colin, 2003, 480.

Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs evoke praise for their emotional depth, unconventional beauty and their challenges to the accepted norms of 19th century photography. She was always

¹ All the images throughout the article are excerpted from "Cox, J. & Colin F. (2003). *Julia Margaret Cameron: The complete photographs*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications."

willing to experiment with the media to contribute to the evolution of photography not only as an artistic form but also as an expressive tool. Her style is usually characterized by soft focus, deliberate blurring of the subject and a strong emphasis on the emotional and spiritual aspects of her models instead of attaching herself to strict realism. She was interested in using long exposures which resulted in creating dreamlike and ethereal quality in her images, and this kind of technique moved her away from the dominant photographic understandings of her time.

Blurred, unclear images that Cameron created also help increase the emotional power of the poems. For instance (See Image 2):

But - for her heard of Arthur newly crown'd,
Tho' not with our an uproar made by those
Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son' - the King
Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou!
For here between the man and beast we die.' (Lines 42-45)



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Vivien and Merlin

Agnes Mangles, Charles Hay Cameron

[1874]; copyright December 8, 1874

JPGM 84.XO.732.1.1.5

**Image 2: Cox & Colin, 2003,
472.**

In the image for the above lines; Arthur, in his deathbed, is visualized in a blurry photograph, creating a poignant and evocative image that generates feelings of farewell, grief, and loneliness. The use of blurriness in the photograph is not merely a technical flaw but a deliberate artistic choice. This technique softens the edges and details, creating an ethereal and dreamlike quality that emphasizes the transient nature of life and the inevitability of death. The blurriness symbolizes the fading presence of King Arthur, a legendary figure whose time is coming to an end. It reflects the emotional and physical decline of a once-mighty ruler, capturing the fragility and vulnerability of his final moments. The indistinct contours of Arthur's form evoke a sense of fading memory, as if he is already slipping away from the realm of the living and into the annals of myth and legend. This visual representation intensifies the feelings of farewell, as viewers are confronted with the stark reality of Arthur's impending departure. The blurred image serves as a metaphor for the uncertainty and ambiguity that accompanies death. It elicits a deep sense of grief, as those who admire and revere Arthur are forced to come to terms with the loss of a great leader and the end of an era. The photograph also conveys a profound

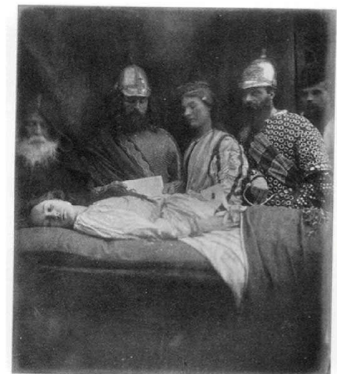
sense of loneliness. In his final moments, Arthur is depicted as a solitary figure, isolated from the world he once ruled. The blurriness enhances this isolation, as if he is enveloped in a mist that separates him from his surroundings and the people he loves. This visual isolation mirrors the emotional isolation that often accompanies death, highlighting the personal and existential loneliness that Arthur experiences as he faces the unknown. Moreover, the aesthetic choice of blurriness aligns with the Victorian fascination with the supernatural and the afterlife. It evokes the idea of a liminal space, a threshold between life and death, reality and myth. Arthur's blurred form suggests that he is on the cusp of crossing over into another realm, enhancing the mystical and melancholic atmosphere of the scene.

She was an experimentalist. Her approach to the art of photography was revolutionary, as she welcomes imperfections like distorting the lens and creating blurriness. She used such techniques not as the defects of photography but as her artistic ornamentation. Her use of close-ups and unprecedented compositions made her work a distinctive one. Cameron often used a makeshift studio in the garden of her home on the Isle of Wight. She created elaborate sets and used natural

light to enhance the atmosphere of her photographs. Although she was not entirely known and celebrated during her life, Cameron's art has gained recognition for her talent in artistic arrangement of her subjects, which influenced later generations of photographers since her unconventional techniques led her to an important figure who would shape the characteristics of the art of photography in the 20th century. As Han Er states, Cameron used "oversized cameras to produce evocative portraits" that put forward her style as a pictorialist, as a consequence of improved lens qualities and decreased exposure times (118).

In another image about Merlin, Julia Margaret Cameron uses close-up, intimate, and touchy *mise-en-scène* to picturesquely dramatize the relationship between Vivien and Merlin. Her approach focuses on the emotional intensity and complexity of their interaction, bringing the characters to life with a depth and immediacy that draws the viewer into their world. By employing close-up shots, Cameron captures the subtle nuances of expression and gesture that convey the underlying tension and intrigue in the relationship between Vivien and Merlin. These shots allow viewers to see the minute details of the characters' faces, emphasizing their emotional states and the dynamics of their interaction. The proximity of the camera to the subjects creates a sense of intimacy, making the viewer feel as if they are witnessing a private, intense moment between the two characters. The intimate *mise-en-scène* further enhances this sense of closeness. Cameron's careful arrangement of the characters within the frame highlights the physical and emotional proximity between Vivien and Merlin. She often positions them in close quarters, with their bodies and faces turned toward each other, creating a palpable sense of connection and interaction. This arrangement not only draws attention to their relationship but also intensifies the drama of the scene, making the viewer feel the tension and magnetism between them. Cameron's use of touchy *mise-en-scène* adds another layer of emotional depth to the photographs. The physical contact between Vivien and Merlin, whether it is a gentle touch, a grasping hand, or an entwined embrace, conveys the power dynamics and the manipulation at play in their relationship. The tactile interactions are carefully staged to reflect the themes of seduction, control, and vulnerability that define their story. Through these physical gestures, Cameron dramatizes the psychological and emotional struggle between Vivien, the enchantress, and Merlin, the wise yet susceptible sage. Additionally, the picturesque quality of Cameron's compositions adds to the dramatic effect. She employs soft lighting, blurred backgrounds, and carefully chosen props to create a visually appealing and evocative setting. This picturesque *mise-en-scène* not only enhances the aesthetic beauty of the photographs but also serves to underscore the mythical and legendary nature of the characters and their story. The combination of artistic elements creates a mood that is both romantic and mysterious, drawing viewers deeper into the narrative (See Image 3):

And there I saw Merlin, whose vast wit
 And hundred winters are but as the hands
 Of Loyal vassals toiling for their liege
 And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
 Who knows a subtler magic than his own -
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
 She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
 Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
 Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
 Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
 But there was heard among the holy hymns
 A voice as of the waters, for she dwells



1190

The corpse of Elaine in the Palace
 of King Arthur

Charles Hay Cameron, William Warder, Mrs.
 Hardinge, two unknown men, unknown woman

[1875]

GEH 76:0024:0011

**Image 3: Cox & Colin, 2003,
 473.**

Down in a deep - calm, whatsoever storms
 May shake the world - and when the surface rolls,
 Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord. (Lines 279-293)

Conclusion

Narratology in poetry extends beyond phonological and semantic patterns to encompass the structural design of lines and stanzas, which plays a vital role in shaping the poem's narrative and emotional resonance. The formal organization of poetry adds a unique dimension to the storytelling and meaning-making process. In the case of Alfred Lord Tennyson's work, this structural integrity is further enriched by the inclusion of visual imagery, notably through the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron. Cameron's artistic contributions, through her semiotic use of photography, not only accompany but elevate Tennyson's poetic lines by deepening the semantic layers of meaning.

Cameron's photographs do not only echo the text; they also serve as visual representations that offer a distinct, interpretative lens through which Tennyson's themes and imagery can be understood. While Tennyson's poetry evokes powerful emotions and vivid mental pictures, the subjective nature of textual interpretation means that readers may form varied and inconsistent images in their minds. Cameron's photographic work functions as a clarifying agent, grounding these variable interpretations in a more concrete visual form that enhances the thematic and emotional elements of the poetry. By doing so, Cameron bridges the gap between abstract poetic imagination and a more tangible representation of the poet's vision. This interplay between text and image not only intensifies the narrative but also makes the poet's work more accessible and vivid, offering a richer, multi-dimensional reading experience.

The collaboration between text and image, while offering a rich, multidimensional interpretation of poetry, can also introduce interpretive complexities. In the case of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographic contributions to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry, the interplay between these two art forms may not always create a faultless parallelism. One of the inherent challenges of such collaborations lies in the variability of readers' subjective responses. Each reader approaches a poem with a unique set of personal experiences, cultural frameworks, and emotional resonances that shape their visualization and understanding of the text. This individual engagement with a poem allows for a multiplicity of imagined worlds, each reader creating mental images that correspond to their interpretation of the poet's language.

Cameron's photographs, while artistically profound and deeply intertwined with the text, offer a single, specific visual interpretation. These images, by their very nature, may not fully encapsulate the diverse range of interpretations that readers might individually envision. This potential incongruity between a reader's imagined landscape and the fixed representation of Cameron's photographs underlines the subjectivity already inherent in both reading and viewing. The act of reading poetry is deeply personal, where meaning is negotiated in the space between the text and the reader's imaginative engagement. Cameron's visual interpretations, though insightful, reflect one possible reading among many, highlighting the complex, layered nature of literary and artistic interpretation.

Despite this potential for dissonance, Cameron's photographs invariably enhance the depth of Tennyson's poems. Her visual artistry adds new layers of meaning, offering not only an aesthetic complement but also an interpretative aid that intensifies the themes and emotions embedded within the poetry. By providing a concrete visual narrative, Cameron helps to evoke additional insights that may not be immediately accessible through the text alone. This process enriches the reader's experience, prompting a re-evaluation and deeper exploration of the poetry in light of the images. The visual context encourages readers to reconsider their interpretations, blending the

poet's words with the photographer's vision to produce a more comprehensive engagement with the text.

In conclusion, Cameron's photographs act as a form of semiotic amplification, deepening both the semantic and narrative complexity of Tennyson's poetry. Whether her images align with or diverge from the reader's imagination, they serve as a vital interpretive tool that expands the reader's understanding of the poetic work. The convergence of Tennyson's lyricism with Cameron's visual art creates a richly textured interplay, where words and images together invite readers into a multifaceted exploration of meaning, emotion, and theme. This collaboration transcends mere illustration, transforming the reader's encounter with the poem into an immersive, multidimensional experience that enhances both the literary and artistic dimensions of the work. Ultimately, the partnership between text and image in Tennyson and Cameron's work contributes to a more nuanced and expansive literary landscape, encouraging continuous reinterpretation and emotional discovery.

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