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Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York, 1982)

In 1861 an English critic, in an article "On Art-Photography," wrote: "Hitherto photography has been principally content with representing Truth. Can its sphere not be enlarged? And may it not aspire to delineate Beauty, too?" He encouraged photographers to produce pictures "whose aim is not merely to amuse, but to instruct, purify and ennoble."[1]

Allegories had been attempted. In 1843 John Edwin Mayall of Philadelphia made ten daguerreotypes to illustrate the Lord's Prayer; they were acclaimed by the British art press when he showed them a few years later in London. In 1848 he produced six plates based on Thomas Campbell's poem "The Soldier's Dream." At the Great Exhibition of 1851 in the London Crystal Palace other American daguerreotypists exhibited allegorical pictures: Martin M. Lawrence, for example, showed a 13 x 17-inch plate of three models facing left, front, and right, which he titled *Past, Present and Future*; it was, he said, inspired by Edward Green Malbone's miniature painting *The Hours*. This daguerreotype was one of several that won for Lawrence a prize medal; but they were made by Gabriel Harrison, then his cameraman, who later protested: "Why not," he asked in a letter published in the New York *Tribune* "give the name of the operator by whom they were taken?"[2]

In the work of Hill and Adamson are many calotypes of friends dressed up in armor and monk's garb, acting out passages from the novels of Sir Walter Scott. These pictures, and the allegorical daguerreotypes, relied for their effect upon the choice, costuming, and posing of models; they were records of *tableaux vivants*, or amateur theatricals. In lighting and in technique they were routine, and foreshadowed theatrical photography.

With the perfection of the collodion process an increasing number of amateurs were attracted to photography, and they brought with them a broader view of artistic matters than the average professional possessed. In 1853 the Photographic Society of London (since 1894 the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain) was founded. Its first president, Sir Charles Eastlake, was himself an amateur, and although the membership was divided between those who practiced photography as an avocation and as a profession, the amateurs were more often heard. At the first meeting Sir William Newton, miniature painter to the court, addressed the members "Upon Photography in an Artistic View."[3] He denied photography's position as an independent art, and urged photographers who were taking studies to be used by painters to put the image slightly out of focus.

The concept was not new. In 1843 daguerreotypists were instructed to use a relatively large lens opening when taking a portrait of a person with wrinkled features to "obtain one of those soft and rather vague likenesses which painters call 'flous'."[4] But Sir William's recommendation led to such a heated controversy that, at a later meeting, he reminded the members that he was referring to photographs taken *for the use of artists*: when making record photographs, the sharper the focus the better, he said.

The silver iodide emulsions of the time were sensitive only to the blue rays of the spectrum and those that lay beyond. It was impossible to photograph objects that reflected *only* red or green: a very bright red flag with a green cross upon it appeared totally black in a print. But pure, monochromatic colors are seldom found in nature except in the rainbow. Blue is present in most hues in varying amounts. In the sky it is predominant, and thus skies were overexposed and cloudless when a sufficient time had been given to record the features of a landscape. At gross overexposure a negative will reverse to a positive. Direct exposure to the sun will often produce a transparent disc in the negative, which will appear in the print as menacingly black. Hence this reversal of tones is known as *solarization*. Because of this phenomenon the skies in wet-plate landscape negatives were not uniformly black, but had patches of low density that gave a mottled appearance to the print. Consequently they were generally retouched around the contours with opaque paint and the remaining sky area was protected with a paper mask.

An alternative was for the photographer to take two negatives of a landscape; one was exposed for the earth-

DAVID OCTAVIUS HILL & ROBERT ADAMSON. *John Henning and the Daughter of Lord Cockburn in a Scene from Sir Walter Scott's Novel "The Antiquary."* ca. 1845. Salted paper print from a calotype negative. Courtesy of Arthur T. Gill, Eastbourne, England.

bound features and the other exposed for a much shorter time in order to record the sky and clouds. The two negatives were masked; part of the print was made from one, and part from the other.

This technique, which came to be called *combination printing*, appears to have been used by Gustave Le Gray of Paris to produce his dramatic seascapes, which were widely praised when they were shown in London in 1856. Making multiple prints from several negatives was carried to an extreme by Oscar G. Rejlander, a Swede working in Wolverhampton, England in his allegorical picture of 1857, *The Two Ways of Life.*[5] He conceived a vast stage on which was acted out an allegory

> representing a venerable sage introducing two young men into life—the one, calm and placid, turns towards Religion, Charity and Industry, and the other virtues, while the other rushes madly from his guide into the pleasures of the world, typified by various figures, representing Gambling, Wine, Licentiousness and other vices; ending in Suicide, Insanity and Death. The center of the picture, in front, between the two parties, is a splendid figure symbolizing Repentance, with the emblem of Hope.[6]

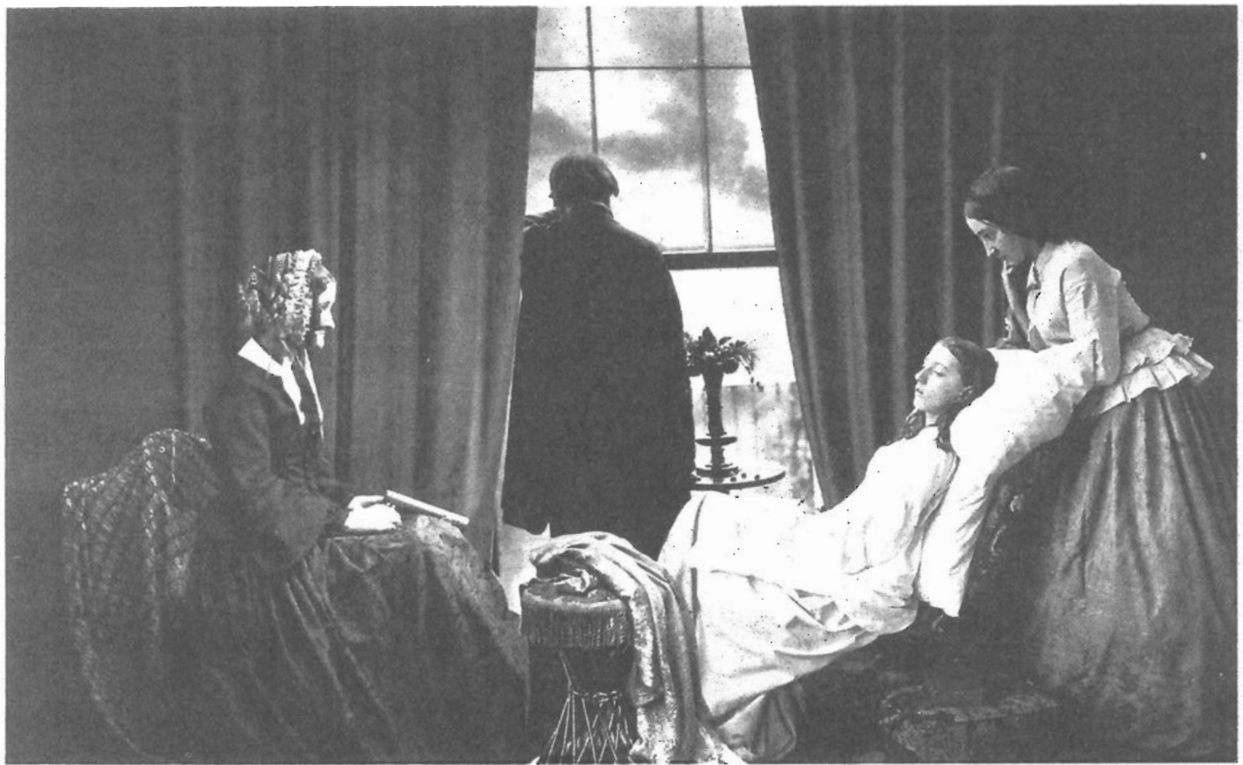
He would have needed a huge studio and many models to take this picture with a single negative. Instead, he enlisted the services of a troupe of strolling players and photographed them in groups at scales appropriate to the distance at which they were to appear from the spectator. On other negatives he photographed models of the stage. He made thirty negatives in all, which he masked so they would fit together like a picture puzzle. Then, painstakingly masking a sheet of sensitized paper to match each negative in turn, he printed them one after the other in the appropriate positions. It took him six weeks to produce the final print, which measured 31 x 16 inches. He made it expressly for display at the Art Treasures Exhibition held in Manchester in 1857. This ambitious undertaking was one of the most important art exhibitions of the nineteenth century. A special building, rivaling the Crystal Palace of London, was erected, and in it was installed a loan exhibition of a 1000 Old Master paintings, hung chronologically, an equal number of contemporary paintings, as well as drawings, engravings, art objects from Persia, India, and China, and ivory sculptures. That 600 photographs were included in this mammoth exhibition is a tribute to the growing position of the new medium in the artistic world. Yet more influential was the purchase of Rejlander's *Two Ways of Life* by Queen Victoria. It was hailed as "a magnificent picture, decidedly the finest photograph of its class ever produced."[7] Rejlander considered it an example of the camera's usefulness to artists, in making a first sketch for an elaborate composition, and said that he could think of no other subject which would enable him better to portray "various draped figures as well as exhibit the beautiful lines of the human form."[8] The nudity was not universally accepted; only the righteous half of the photograph was shown at the annual exhibition of the Edinburgh Photographic Society.

Rejlander produced a large number of character studies, of street urchins, genre groups, and self-portraits in theatrical gestures. For he was, at heart, an actor. He delighted in such make-believe as photographing himself as Garibaldi, the then-popular Italian hero. He liked to register such emotions as fear and disgust before the camera. Charles Darwin used some of these to illustrate his book *The Expression of the Emotions* (1872). He also used some of Rejlander's photographs of infants; one of them, a child weeping in a somewhat comic fashion, became so popular it was said that over a quarter of a million copies were sold. Rejlander also produced what may well be one of the first deliberately double-exposed photographs, *Hard Times.*

Henry Peach Robinson, a painter and etcher who took up photography as a profession in 1852 in Leamington, England, first became famous with *Fading Away*, a com-

OSCAR G. REJLANDER. *The Two Ways of Life.* 1857. Combination albumen print. The Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England.

OSCAR G. REJLANDER. *Hard Times.* 1860. Combination albumen print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y. On the mount Rejlander has written: "A Spiritistical Photo."



HENRY PEACH ROBINSON. *Fading Away.* 1858. Combination albumen print. George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

bination print showing a dying girl attended by grief-stricken parents. On the mat he wrote:

> Must, then, that peerless form
> Which love and admiration cannot view
> Without a beating heart; those azure veins,
> Which steal like streams along a field of snow,
> That lovely outline, which is fair
> As breathing marble, perish?
>
> —Shelly

The print was made from five negatives. Robinson stated that the principal model "was a fine healthy girl of about fourteen, and the picture was done to see how near death she could be made to look."[9] The public was shocked by the subject; it was felt to be poor taste to represent so painful a scene. Though such criticism no longer seems valid, we should not ignore it as Victorian sentimentality. Far more painful subjects were painted in those days. But the very fact it was a *photograph* implied that it was a truthful representation, and so the scene was viewed literally. Its artificiality did not escape criticism. "Look steadily at it a minute," the *Literary Gazette* told its readers, "and all reality will 'fade away' as the make-up forces itself more and more on the attention."[10] Such criticism, which was widespread, was discouraging. Rejlander wrote Robinson in 1859:

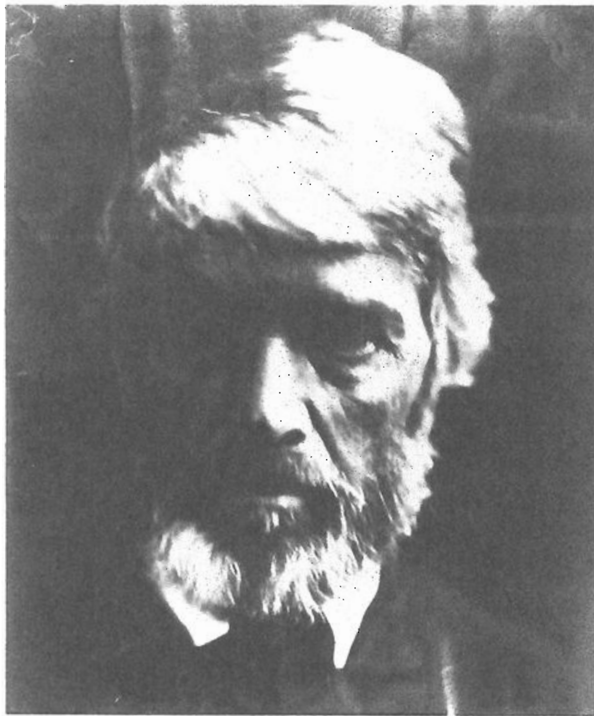
> I am tired of Photography for the public, particularly composite photos, for there *can be no gain* and there is no honor but cavil and misrepresentation. The next Exhibition must, then, only contain Ivied Ruins and landscapes forever besides portraits—and then stop.[11]

But Robinson produced quantities of art-photographs: he published one every year. His influence was even more strongly felt through his prolific writing. His *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, 1869,[12] went through edition after edition, and was translated into French and German. The book, a handy manual for the production of art-photographs, was based on academic rules of composition. Robinson illustrated his text with his own photographs and etchings, and with reproductions of paintings by Benjamin West, J. M. W. Turner, William Mulready, David Wilkie, and other Victorian artists, including the illustrator Myles Birket Foster. His stated aim was

> to set forth the laws which govern—as far as laws can be applied to a subject which depends in some measure on taste and feeling—the arrangement of a picture, so that it shall have the greatest amount of pictorial effect, and to illustrate by examples those broad principles without regard to which imitation, however minute or however faithful, is not picturesque, and does not rise to the dignity of art.[13]

To force the camera image to conform to these academic formal concepts required ingenuity and manipulative skill. Robinson habitually began by drawing a sketch of the final composition. If it was to be a combination print he posed the models separately. Not all his

HENRY PEACH ROBINSON. *Carrolling*. 1887. Combination albumen print and the artist's sketch for its production. The Royal Photographic Society, Bath, England.



JULIA MARGARET CAMERON. *Thomas Carlyle.* 1867. Albumen print. The National Portrait Gallery, London.

Carlyle, on receiving this portrait, wrote Mrs. Cameron: "It is as if it suddenly began to speak, terrifically ugly and woe-begone."

pictures were printed from several negatives, however; many group photographs were acted out by models in his studio. At the very time when painters were moving their easels outdoors, Robinson was building nature under the skylight: shrubbery was mounted on a rolling platform; a brook was improvised from the darkroom drain; clouds were painted on backdrops. He told the beginning photographer that

Any "dodge, trick, and conjuration," of any kind is open to the photographer's use *so that it belongs to his art, and is not false to nature....* It is his imperative duty to avoid the mean, the bare and the ugly, and to aim to elevate his subject, to avoid awkward forms, and to correct the unpicturesque.[14]

There was a curious duality apparent in the writings and work of these artist-photographers. Robinson on one page wrote that beautiful photographs could be made "by the mixture of the real and the artificial,"[15] and on another page praised "this perfect truth, this absolute rendering of light and shade and form . . . beyond the reach of the painter and sculptor."[16] The nineteenth-century critic Jabez Hughes, while praising Rejlander's and Robinson's work, strongly rebelled against combination printing.

When an artist conceives a brilliant thought, and hastens to put it on canvas, how he sighs that he is obliged to work piecemeal—that he cannot, with one sweep of his brush, realize the thought in his mind. It is the proud boast of photography that it can do this.[17]

This ambivalence is characteristic of the photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron. Her dynamic portraits are among the most noble and impressive yet produced by means of the camera; her costume pieces, on the other hand, lie within the stylistic idiom of the Pre-Raphaelite painters.

At Freshwater Bay, in the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Cameron, whose husband was a British civil servant, entertained illustrious friends: Tennyson, Herschel, Carlyle, Darwin, Browning, Longfellow. She took up photography in middle age: a portrait titled *Annie, My First Success* is dated 1864. She trained her camera on her friends; by the sheer force of her personality she seems to have intimidated them into cooperation. In her autobiographical *Annals of My Glass House* she describes the intensity she brought to portraiture:

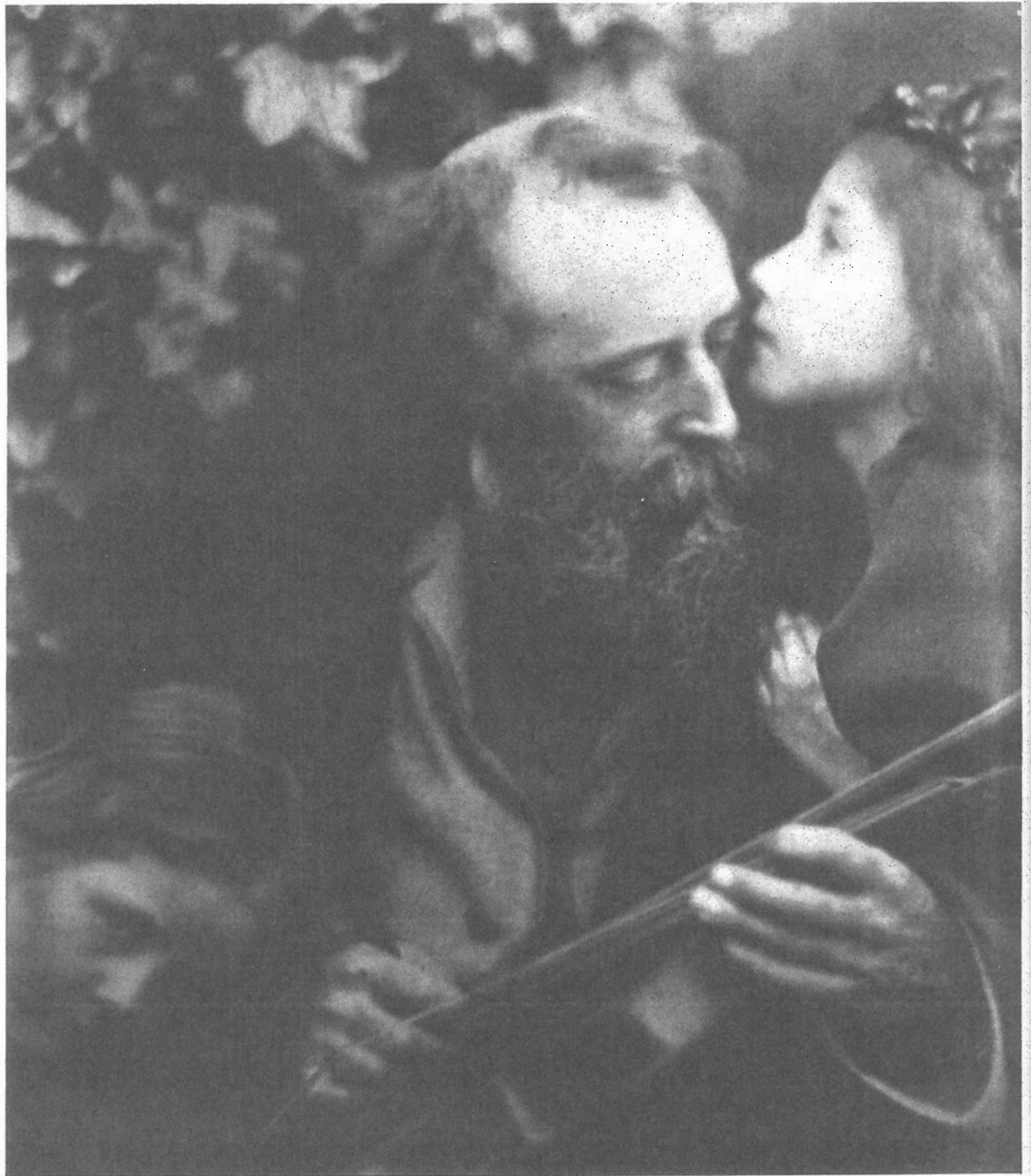
When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavored to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man. The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer.[18]

She blundered her way through technique, resorting to any means to get desired effects. The blurred, out-of-focus images that many critics deplored were deliberate. She wrote to her friend Sir John Herschel that she hoped to elevate her art beyond

mere conventional topographic Photography—map making & skeleton rendering of feature & form without that roundness & fulness of force & feature that modelling of flesh & limb which the focus I use only can give tho' called & condemned as "*out of focus*." What is focus—& who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus—My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real & ideal & sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry & Beauty—.[19]

Mrs. Cameron gave her photographs that breadth and simplicity that was characteristic of early calotypes. Her compositions, inspired by her friendship with the painter George Frederick Watts, are for the most part costume pieces, *tableaux vivants*, with her family and friends acting out scenes from literature before the camera. She admired the work of Rejlander and invited him to Freshwater Bay "to help her with his great knowledge." But her greatest debt, she said, was to the painter and photographer David Wilkie Wynfield, who photographed his friends dressed in Renaissance costume: "To my feeling about his beautiful Photography I owed *all* my attempts and indeed consequently all my success," she wrote William Michael Rossetti in 1864.[20] Her illustrations to

JULIA MARGARET CAMERON. *Mrs. Herbert Duckworth (later Mrs. Leslie Stephen), Mother of Virginia Woolf.* 1867. Albumen print. Collection Beaumont Newhall, Santa Fe.



JULIA MARGARET CAMERON. *The Kiss of Peace—G. F. Watts and Children.* ca. 1867. Gum platinum print by Alvin Langdon Coburn from the original negative. Collection Beaumont Newhall, Santa Fe.

LADY CLEMENTINA HAWARDEN. *Photographic Study.* ca. 1863. Albumen print. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King,* her religious groups, her studies of children posed as angels or as *Venus Chiding Cupid and Removing His Wings* stand in contrast to her powerful portraits. Without the challenge of interpreting great personalities, her work tended to become lost in sentiment and to echo paintings. This was deliberate on the part of Mrs. Cameron: she wrote on the mount of one of her prints, "decidedly Pre-Raphaelite."

More and more people found photography a stimulating avocation. Lady Clementina Hawarden made many photographs of her family in the 1860s, and some of her full-length portraits of young women in resplendent Victorian costume, bathed in light, have a charm and soft sentiment that is in direct contrast to the force of Mrs. Cameron's portraits. Her work was admired by Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* An ardent amateur, he made many photographs of the children who were his friends and of celebrated contemporaries.

An extraordinary series of photographs of Victor Hugo living in exile on the island of Jersey were taken in 1853–54 by his son Charles and his friend the poet Auguste Vacquerie. An eerie romanticism pervades these pictures; details seem selected for their symbolism: Hugo's favorite rocks or his resting place under the flowering vines of the conservatory. A series of just hands—Hugo's and his wife's—was made; a novel idea in photography, it was a portent of the close-up. Hugo was greatly interested in these photographs, and even made a drawing based on the *negative* of a gnarled and twisted barnacle-clad breakwater—an astonishingly early recognition of the beauty of the tone reversal of a negative image.

LEWIS CARROLL. *Alice Grace Weld as "Little Red Riding Hood."* 1857. Albumen print. Gernsheim Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

If photographers found inspiration in paintings, painters found photography a useful ally. We do not know who took the series of photographs for the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, but we know they were posed by the painter in July 1865 and were used in his painting *La Reverie.* Many other famous painters of the nineteenth century were grateful to photography: Eugène Delacroix posed nude models, and from the photographs that his friend Eugène Durieu took of them he made frequent sketches. He wrote his friend Constant Dutilleux of his enthusiasm for photography in a letter dated March 7, 1854:

> How I regret that such a wonderful invention arrived so late—I mean as far as I am concerned! The possibility of studying such results would have had an influence on me that I can only guess at by their usefulness to me now, even with the little time I can put aside studying them in depth: it is the tangible demonstration of drawing from nature, of which we have had more than quite imperfect ideas.[21]

Gustave Courbet based the nude model in his 1849 *The Artist's Studio* on a photograph. Jean François Millet told his pupil Edward Wheelwright that photographs are valuable as studies for drapery and other details.

Other artists used photography in a more slavish manner, basing whole compositions on the camera image. This was particularly true of portraiture. William Etty's *Self Portrait* (London, National Portrait Gallery) is hardly more than an enlarged copy of a calotype by Hill and Adamson, made in 1844, on the occasion of the artist's visit to Edinburgh. Many American painters relied upon daguerreotypes in the pose and delineation of the features of celebrities. Charles Loring Eliot, a popular American portraitist, for example, based his painting of the novelist James Fenimore Cooper on a daguerreotype ascribed to Mathew B. Brady. Such use of his daguerreotypes was intended by Brady; he wrote Samuel F. B. Morse in 1855 asking his opinion "in reference to the aid which . . . Daguerreotyping has afforded the kindred arts of painting, drawing and engraving. . . . During my experience, I have endeavored to render it as far as possible an auxiliary to the artist."[22] Morse's reply is not known.

To the British realist genre painters of the Victorian period, photography was an especial boon, though they would seldom admit it. For example, William Powell Frith, the popular genre painter of Victorian England, stated in 1893: "In my opinion photography has not benefitted art at all,"[23] yet in 1863 the London periodical *Photographic Notes* reported:

Photographer unknown. *Jane Morris.* 1865. Albumen print. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as a study for a painting.

On a Derby Day, Mr. Frith employed his kind friend, Mr. [Robert] Howlett, to photograph for him from the roof of a cab as many queer groups of figures as he could, and in this way the painter of that celebrated picture, the "Derby Day" got many useful studies, not to introduce literally into his picture, as Robinson and Rejlander would have done, but to work up in his own mind and then reproduce with the true mark of genius stamped upon them.[24]

The same magazine reported that Frith commissioned Samuel Fry to make a series of 25 x 18-inch negatives for help in painting his equally popular *Life at a Railway Station.*

The technology of photography also presented to etchers and printmakers a new medium: the *cliché-verre,* a term for which there is no English equivalent. A glass negative is prepared by hand, from which prints can be made on photographic paper. The artist simply draws with a stylus upon a coated plate, scratching through the emulsion with each stroke. The process was especially popular among the members of the Barbizon School in the 1850s, to whom it was introduced by Adelbert Cuvelier. The most prolific of the artists who used the cliché-verre process was Jean Baptiste Corot, who produced sixty-six plates.

J.-B.-C. COROT. *Self-Portrait.* 1858. Cliché-verre. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

Art critics did not accept photography as readily as artists. They often used the word in a negative way, to condemn painting and sculpture that, to their eyes, did not go beyond verisimilitude, but merely recorded the outward appearance of the world. Charles Baudelaire was exceptionally harsh. In 1859 the French Society of Photography at last succeeded in getting the Ministry of Fine Arts to allow them to hold an exhibition in the Palace of the Champs Élysées at the time of the annual painting Salon. Baudelaire reviewed the show:

If photography is allowed to supplement art in some of its functions, it will soon have supplanted or corrupted it altogether . . . It is time, then, for it to return to its true duty, which is to be the servant of the sciences and arts—but the very humble servant, like printing or shorthand, which have neither created nor supplemented literature. Let it hasten to enrich the tourist's album and restore to his eye the precision which his memory may lack; let it adorn the naturalist's library, and enlarge microscopic animals; let it even provide information to corroborate the astronomer's hypotheses; in short let it be the secretary and clerk of whoever needs an absolute factual exactitude in his profession—up to that point nothing could be better. Let it rescue from oblivion those tumbling ruins, those books, prints and manuscripts which time is devouring, precious things whose form is dissolving and which demand a place in the archives of our memory—it will be thanked and applauded. But if it be allowed to encroach upon the domain of the impalpable and the imaginary, upon anything whose value depends solely upon the addition of something of a man's soul, then it will be so much the worse for us![25]