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Seeing Double:
The Victorian Virtual and Projections of Female Subjectivity

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Margaret E. Gover

June 2012

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There are many other images in the dissertation which I feel greatly enhance the reading experience. Many of the images of Victorian British paintings are in the public domain and are being used under the “fair use” code of the U.S. copyright law, section 107. I thank the Houghton Library at Harvard University, The Pre-Raphaelite Trust in London, The Fine Arts Society in London, The Tate Gallery in London, The Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Dr. Stephen Herbert of www.victorian-cinema.net, and the City Art Gallery in Leeds for graciously making the images available to the public. Additionally, Stijn Desmedt, Avril White, Malgorzata Maj, and Urzula Ciolkowska have granted me permission to use their art works for analysis. Their contemporary art pieces have added a richness to the analysis of the continuing cultural relevance of the Lady of Shalott and for that I am truly grateful.
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This dissertation is dedicated to my loving mother and father, Maria and Chuck Gover, my understanding roommate, Kristen Pinta, and my supportive partner, John Purnell.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Seeing Double:
The Victorian Virtual and Projections of Female Subjectivity

by

Margaret E. Gover

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2012
Dr. Joseph Childers and Dr. Toby Miller, Co-Chairpersons

This dissertation interrogates nineteenth-century subjectivities and visual cultures which were necessary precursors of what is now called the virtual. In the project I utilize a variety of nineteenth-century optical science texts in order to question how understandings of vision and the illusory nature of the virtual focus contributed to explanations of subject formation in female characters. The title, “Seeing Double,” references theories of stereoscopy and binocular vision. The knowledge that human three-dimensional vision is composed of two distinct views from two individual eyes within one seeing body, and that impressions of a three-dimensional physical world could be artificially produced, was a powerful idea for Victorian texts. Authors draw on the idea of composite vision in their narrative structure, allowing readers to glimpse multiple views of the world which may or may not be “actual.” Authors such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Lewis Carroll use visual technologies as metaphors for the woman’s body in order to highlight the interpretive female gaze. In the
burgeoning British cinema. British filmmakers, such as Cecil B. Hepworth, James Williamson, and George Albert Smith, reproduced the literary technique of at once crediting and discrediting sight. Their works all depict women as translucent, changeable bodies who must be scrutinized but can never be wholly understood. Both literary and cinematic narratives allow for the possibility of a virtual world of experience where an individual female character’s interpretation is juxtaposed against a network of experience which constitutes the “actual.” Analyzed within the context of nineteenth-century optics texts, all of these visual experiences are understood as valid interpretations of the external world. “Seeing Double” adds to current discourses about the virtual by forwarding the Victorian woman’s visual experience as a site of such virtuality.
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Introduction: Vision Bears All

In 2011, HBO premiered the television series Game of Thrones, an adaptation from a popular series of fantasy books. Along with many other mediaphiles, I began to watch. The show is very popular, partially due to its pre-existing literary audience. However, as I continued to watch, I noticed something interesting; the show trades in images of women’s bodies. Every episode is sure to flaunt the bodies of naked women. While there are instances of male full frontal nudity in the first season of the series, two in the entire season, the instances of female nudity far out-number those of men. As I was revising the existing chapters of my dissertation, I began to wonder if anything had changed in the last two hundred years. My project explores visual technologies of the nineteenth-century, finding that myriad possibilities for subjectivities exist within concepts of the visual from the nineteenth century, and that the female body was used to imagine these possibilities. Women were examined, scrutinized, and stripped of clothing in an effort to examine the movement of the human body, the relationship of sight to psyche, and the applications of early motion picture technology. Looking at women was useful, and it was pleasurable.

This recalls Laura Mulvey’s feminist film critique from the 1970s. In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” she argues that narrative cinema uses women as visual spectacle which removes them from subjectivity. Their bodies, often seen as erotic images and fragments of a whole, do not allow for women’s characters to become fully formed and introspective. Instead, images of women were used as pleasurable sights for men, both the men on the screen and the ones in the audience. This is achieved through
camera framing which literally contained them. Women were seen as erotic parts of a whole. All audiences were then put in the male subject position. While there have been many who have argued for a more nuanced reading than Mulvey offers, her analysis does seem to be valid when watching *Game of Thrones*. Women are simply breasts, buttocks, and pubic bones waiting to be devoured by the men on the screen and by the viewing audience. In the diagsis of the story, women are traded for their usefulness in reproduction. In the first episode a brother gives his sister, as a bride, to a warrior in exchange for the use of his army. Women, in the story, are often used in lieu of money. The story creates an entirely different set of rules for diagetic world, but it maintains a culture where women’s bodies are used as currency both for the characters on screen and to garner audience. But, surely in a mythic world where dragons can be born from fossilized eggs and a girl can survive being burned alive in a funeral pyre it should be possible for us to create more productive ways to imagine women’s, and men’s, bodies. Perhaps we could, but it might not get great ratings.

In a quandary over contemporary media, I returned to the starting point of this project to find the answer to my question: in regards to women’s bodies, not much has changed in the last two-hundred years. Mary Poovey discusses the nineteenth century negotiations between religion, medicine, and law as they struggled to exert control over women’s bodies in her book *Uneven Developments*. These negotiations between men were executed in complex rhetorical moves which were dependent upon control over the ways that women were understood. While the religious argued that women were primarily spiritual, and therefore lacking physicality, and the lawyers argued that women
were alternatively property, non-existent, or absorbed into the subjectivity of their husbands, the medical men took a different tactic (6). They argued that they were necessitated by their profession to see women’s bodies. With the development of chloroform, medical professionals, instead of midwives, were increasingly entrusted with women during childbirth. Because medical men were allowed to literally envision women’s bodies they had the most access to women and, they argued, should control the ways that women were understood (28-46). All of the arguments assume that women should have no control over the meaning that is made from their bodies. Poovey does not point out the strange battle over the visual in the different rhetorics she discusses, yet these arguments are predicated upon the assumptions about the physicality of the women’s body and the ability to properly “see” such a body.

Poovey’s arguments seem oddly familiar in Visible Woman, a collection of essays about the ways that women’s bodies were viewed at the end of the twentieth century. In these articles, the authors examine medical imaging, legal discourse, and religious fervor which all present arguments for their sovereignty in interpreting female bodies. These arguments are primarily based on visual evidence. For example, Valerie Hartouni’s “Fetal Exposures: Abortion Politics and the Optics of Allusion” argues that early term sonograms were instrumental in religious and legal arguments which claimed fetal personhood was a justification for barring abortion. Because a picture could be taken of the fetus while inside the women’s body, it became more important than the woman herself in this argument. The woman’s personhood is compromised by the ability to peer into her body. Other essays in the collection, such as Carol Stabile’s “Shooting the
Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance” and Ella Shohat’s “‘Lasers for Ladies:’ Endo Discourse and the Inscription of Science,” address issues similar to this. The ability to see inside a woman’s body allows discourses to be formed about the subjectivity of what is growing there, and to dismiss the woman as a mere host to the new life form. In these twentieth century negotiations, the female body is open to outside interpretation because it is visible to others. This brief foray into arguments about the ethics of twentieth century medical imaging illuminates two important points. First, at the end of the twentieth century, women’s bodies were still being used as the texts on which to base arguments about vision and subjectionhood. These deliberations are all addressing a basic problem: how can the individual subject be understood in an age of medical imaging and biological intervention? It should be noted that these arguments are all formed around female subjects. Secondly, the three parties attempting to exert control over the women’s bodies and subjectionhood at the end of the twentieth century are the medical, the legal, and the religious fields, the same as those who Poovey outlines as attempting to exert control over women’s bodies in nineteenth-century England.¹

My project does not explore contemporary media, but is instead concerned with the ways that women’s subjectivities were constructed within the technological understandings of sight in the nineteenth-century. This is a timely discussion as sight is

¹ Another interesting similarity is in Poovey’s discussion of hysteria as challenging the medical man’s authority and Mark Rose’s discussion of surrogate mothers and children (Poovey Uneven Developments 46). In “Mothers and Authors: Johnson v. Calvert and the New Children of Our Imaginations,” Rose argues that a surrogate child was conceptualized as intellectual property of the biological parents. While he does not point this out, the surrogate mother who feels that she is the child’s “rightful” mother is hysterical in her thinking. She is influenced by her uterus rather than her reason.
clearly one way through which women’s subjectivities are still understood. Looking into the past can help shed light on the present. The project explores British understandings of sight and optics and their implications for female subjectivity. Early in the nineteenth-century ideas about vision began to change. Whereas the Newtonian theories of optics had been the most widely accepted for two-hundred years, scientific acceptance of color theories which challenged Newton’s material understanding of light would popularize subjective vision. These theories permeated the culture through popular science texts and offered multiple possibilities for valid visual experience. Concepts of self would forever be affected by this scientific upheaval. The virtual focus and virtual image severed the connection between the physical world and sight, but were scientifically understood as a valid vision of the external world. The stereoscope denied a singular visual subjectivity in an observer. Instead of one view of the world, binocular vision insisted that everyone who has two functional eyes is seeing a composite of the world. Point-of-view, even within one seeing body, was no longer singular. As optics influenced the way that people understood themselves in nineteenth-century England, the woman’s body became the fictional model through which to play with these concepts. Female characters in fictional texts became envisioned through various technologies, which in turn affected the ways their subjectivity was portrayed. The visualizing of women was one of the contributing factors that lead to the creation of the modern subject at the dawn of the twentieth century.

While theories of optics were changing early in the nineteenth century, it is important to note that they were being influenced by earlier philosophies of vision and
perception. For example, Immanuel Kant’s writing on the determination of the aesthetics, *Critique of Judgement*, questions the relationship between the object and the perception of the object. His writing vacillates between justifying the subjective nature of perception and insisting upon the objective power of that which is perceived. He claims that “there can be no objective rule of taste which shall determine by means of concepts what is beautiful. For every judgment from this source is aesthetical; i.e. the feeling of the subject, and not a concept of the object, is its determining ground” (68). Yet he insists that “we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever, i.e. no aesthetical judgment which can make a rightful claim upon everyone’s assent” (47). Kant hopes to locate the material world somewhere beyond the feeling subject’s experience of it. This sensual experience hints towards that very existence of the material objective reality. Kant’s theories are constantly questioning if the object can ever exist if the individual’s perception of the object is constantly in competition with it. As Terry Eagleton explains, in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* “one can settle stoically for the irreducibility of the real to thought, thus recognizing the limits of one’s own subjectivity” (77).

Kant’s concept of the aesthetic can help to locate two kinds of subjectivity which were already at play at the dawn of the nineteenth century: the political subject and the individual subject. According to Kant, the aesthetic can create community in that if all the individuals agree, they have a common bond of judgment (74). This, I would argue, contributes to the notion of the political subject in the early nineteenth century. The political subject is a person who is controlled, manipulated, or organized by existing
institutions in society. The community sanctioned judgment of aesthetics which Kant discusses is one way to understand these political institutions. They are agreed upon by the masses. However, Kant’s is perhaps a hopeful delineation. The sanctioned judgment can also be that which is endorsed by the powerful political body. The political subject is a subject of the state. The individual subject is sometimes complicit with and sometimes opposed to that community sanctioned judgment. The individual subject sees and feels independently and can therefore interpret his or her own life. Everything this subject experiences and feels contributes to who the person becomes. These two different subjects can never, in their most simplified terms, exist within an organized society. The individual must always be a part of the political and the political must always be subject to the whims of individuals. For Kant, the individual requires some external other with whom to agree in order to create a unified “taste,” however any acknowledgement that others have valid judgment threatens to challenge the individual’s judgment when in disagreement. In this dynamic, “there can be no sovereignty without someone to reign over, yet his very presence threatens to throw one’s lordship into jeopardy” (Eagleton 71). This is the discomfort that arises between these two theories of subjectivity. The political subject who is controlled by the agreement of the masses can easily become, and in fact already is, the individual subject who is interpreting the external world with no deference to any external other. Each exists only in relation to each other, and each person embodies both.

Within the dynamic of the individual and the political subject exits the notion that the individual is always the subject of scrutiny in the political system. Of central
importance in the analyses presented in this study is the tension between the observer and the way the observer is, in turn, observed. Each of the chapters will examine the ways that the female character is figured as envisioning her world and the opportunities that the narrator, other characters, and the reader have to envision that female character. These complex, and often contentious, fields of vision produce the power relations through which vision and gender are negotiated in nineteenth-century literature. The Lacanian theory of the gaze and the relationship between the viewer and the external world are rooted in a tradition of discourses like Kant’s which situate the individual within and against a visual collective. The collective is easily turned into the political, and with that come implications of power and desire. Jacques Lacan argues that there is a fundamental
divide between what we consider vision and what he terms the “gaze.” Vision is simply the mechanism through which the human body sees. The gaze, on the other hand, is influenced by the scopic drive: the desire to consume through vision. The gaze creates power and consumptive relationships between the gazer and the external world. The gaze also creates our consciousness. It is through the interpretation of the external world, and the determination of one’s position within it, that the individual creates a consciousness (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 67-78). However, this consciousness also alerts the individual that s/he is visually consumed, or made “a picture,” for others. Lacan uses his illustration of the image screen to demonstrate that when the individual gazes upon the subject of representation, the subject of representation also gazes onto the individual.

The diagram is of two triangles layered upon each other (fig. i.1). In the triangle on the left is the individual and the geometrical field of optics through which s/he sees. The apex of the triangle is the singular point-of-view from which the individual is gazing upon the subject. The subject of representation is the long flat side of the triangle and the line which bisects the triangle is the image screen, or the image of the subject that the individual can understand through that singular point-of-view. As the individual internalizes this process of looking, s/he understands that s/he is also turned into an image screen for the opposing subject. Therefore, the subject is also a gazer, represented by the apex of the triangle on the right. These two gazes become layered upon one another, and the individual must then be aware that the image s/he perceives must be no more or less interpretive than the image the subject perceives of the individual (*Four Fundamental
Concepts 105-106). In Lacanian terms then, the gaze of the individual is intrinsically tied to the gaze which falls upon the individual.

Jonathan Crary argues that the nineteenth century witnessed a massive reorganization of the principles of sight which in turn reorganized notions of the “observer.” He cites the camera obscura as being associated with an older version of sight where the observer is stationary and fixed, viewing an external world from a disconnected vantage point. This older model, he argues, was abandoned at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the stereoscope and the photograph waged war for the reorganized observer. He argues that the “stereoscope signals an eradication of the ‘point of view’ around which, for several centuries, meanings had been assigned reciprocally to an observer and the object of his or her vision” (128). Eventually, in a return to the principles of the camera obscura, the photograph won, however the mechanized world through which many of these principles were observed had already ushered in the ethos of the modern era. Additionally, vision was corporealized through this process, as the sciences physiognomically described the seeing subject whose body creates meaning rather than the referent. However, eventually the body and the referent were both disregarded as being less important in the process of observing. While the eyes and their position on the face were increasingly understood as producing and participating in vision, the human mind, or perception, was also understood as responsible for the phenomenon. For example, while the two eyes were seeing the two different images in the stereoscope, the mind was conveying an understanding to the viewer that these two images were one perceived reality. While Crary makes some
interesting points, he argues for a monolithic observer at the end of the nineteenth century. While there was a formalization of the cinematic audience by the early twentieth century, many modes of viewing still existed within the culture. The popularity of the stereoscope through the mid-twentieth century illustrates that the “alternative” idea of the observer was still active until much later in the century. This is just one example of the resistances to what Crary calls the dominant mode of viewing.

Kate Flint argues that, while vision was a dominant mode of understanding and explaining the world throughout the nineteenth century, it was also highly contested and problematized. There was not a singular model of the observer’s station in the world, as Crary contends, nor was being a visible subject always conceptualized as the best subject position. The seen and the unseen were both advantageous and dangerous for the observer. Similarly, being seen and remaining invisible were both considered powerful and perilous in different models of vision. Introspective and metaphorical modes of sight also served to understand non-visual experiences of life, and they served to disembody the experience of sight. She states that the Victorians were encouraged to rethink the “stable” visual world by

the idea that there may always be another way, or set of ways, of looking at an object; that there may be more to [an object] than ‘meets the eye’; that a different subjectivity will ensure that it is seen and interpreted in a different way; [and] that new techniques of viewing will enable a different conceptualization of the visual world. (37)
These arguments about sight show how prolific versions of sight were in the nineteenth century. Flint cites vision as being a model for understanding in artistic discourse, as well as mechanics, medicine, paranormal phenomena, and even the human psyche. Her argument that scientists and medical doctors used metaphors to make invisible phenomena visible for the non-scientific reader is strangely reminiscent of the twenty-first century medical imaging techniques discussed in *The Visible Woman*. These various ways of envisioning the world all held credence, and can be found in such varied discourse that it is impossible to argue that the general public was ignorant of these modes of vision.

Anne Friedberg also finds fault with a monolithic understanding of the observer in the nineteenth century. She finds accounts of vision like Crary’s dependent upon a model of the panoptic gaze and argues that, while it may suggest “increased priority of the visual register, there were alternative gazes that, while still reordering the importance of the visual, produced different—more fluid—forms of subjectivity” (*Window Shopping* 16). She finds that there is a paradox in the positions Crary assumes, that the new images were mobile but that the observer had a fixed relationship to them thereby making them rigid. This paradox offers the foundation for a more fluid subjectivity which is not wholly corporeal. Friedberg argues that Crary does not take gendered readings of vision into account. The new consumer culture of the department store and the arcade allowed women to have access to new ways of seeing, yet their subjectivity was at risk. Women who walked the streets did not have the invisibility of the flâneur who became a part of the fabric of the streets; instead, they had the potential to be perceived as street walkers.
Giuliana Bruno’s argument is similar to Friedberg’s, but it is more radical. While Friedberg argues for a more varied understanding of “gazes,” as opposed to “the gaze,” Bruno argues that the theory of the gaze, and the Lacanian insistence on voyeurism, marginalized other methods of picturing the world in Western culture. The construction of space and the human sentient experience of it are discourses that have been overlooked by theories of cinema and have therefore dismissed an early feminist perspective in nineteenth-century image studies. She uses nineteenth-century female travel writing to argue that the “feeling” of moving through space is a feminine feature. In these accounts, she finds that women’s accounts are so detailed that they were “a form of (pre)cinematic site-seeing” (83). In her argument, the haptic informs the visual.

My reading of nineteenth-century optics is informed by Bruno’s arguments about the haptic nature of sight as envisioned by the female site-seer. I argue that, through optical theory, it becomes evident that sight is experiential. The wave theory of light allows for a fluid understanding of sight. Light waves are constantly interpreted by viewers, and therefore different viewers can experience the physical world differently through vision. The earlier mode of sight, one which relied on a physical interaction between the eye and the object it viewed, was based on materiality. In this conception the physicality of the object produced visual sensation. While the wave theory of light challenged the notion of material sight, it did not eliminate it. Understanding light waves was primarily interpretive. The concept of the virtual image requires an observer who is situated past the focal point of a mirror, and the focal point of the mirror is simply a meeting of light waves.
Any discussion of the Victorian virtual must necessarily confront the problematic nature of both Victorian and current conceptions of the real. In nineteenth century optical discourse, the “real” focus is contrasted to the “virtual” focus because in the real focus the light rays actually converge whereas the virtual focus is the point at which the rays seem to converge, but are prevented from doing so by a mirror. The virtual focus can make objects appear in spaces they did not occupy: a virtual image. However, the real focus was also capable of producing visual impressions which were not complicit with the physical object being viewed, and this was also called a virtual image. Both of these experiences were considered valid in geometric optics, and therefore the “real” image was no more or less an illusion than the “virtual” image. The very concept of an objective external reality was challenged by the nineteenth-century color theory which was dependant on light waves. In this theory, sight was an individual experience produced by the interpretation of wave-length refraction (Young “Theory of Light and Colours” 143-147). Real, in these terms, refers to a physical interaction, even one which is invisible or creates virtual impressions. The virtual, then, is the image that creates a chasm between the physical world and the visual interpretation of it.

Contemporary discussions of nineteenth-century realism complicate this relationship. Gillen D’Arcy Wood contrasts romanticism with “realism” while Jennifer Green-Lewis contrasts positive realism with romantic realism. These two works show how cumbersome the terms realism and romanticism have become in contemporary criticism. One might assume that they both discuss the same romanticism and that the

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2 See chapter 1 pp 32-34 for a more thorough discussion of these concepts.
realism that Wood discusses is the same realism that Green-Lewis renames positivism. However, their two analyses do not correspond to each other well in this way. Wood discusses romanticism as being tied to some intrinsic truth of the object. The romantic artist’s value lies in his ability to tease out of this empirical truth some metaphysical understanding which would be enlightening for the general public (4). This is more closely related to Green-Lewis’ concept of positive realism. She describes positivism as the Victorian idea that there is intrinsic and empirical truth connected to objects in the world. Green-Lewis’ description of the Victorian concept of romanticism is that there is no empirical truth, and instead that all experience is a metaphysical construction (13-36). What Wood terms realism are those exhibitions which displayed historical artifacts or close analogues of scenery as public spectacle. Wood’s argument is that these artifacts and analogues were shocking because they were so close to reality (7-14). However, they were culturally valuable because they democratized experience, much as Green-Lewis’ conception of romanticism did. Everyone’s experience of the panorama of Rome, for example, was important. Wood might argue that instead of simply allowing an artist to interpret what was important in the scene, the public was allowed to determine for themselves what aspect of the scene meant the most to them. Green-Lewis might argue

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3 Green-Lewis uses photography to argue her point that the Romantic artist was no less representing the real than were the photograph or the realist novelist who would emerge later in the century. They were all representing reality, but were looking at the world through different lenses of metaphysical experience. This argument is supported by methods of photography which were often used to distort images by using lighting and focusing techniques. See for example Nancy Armstrong’s example of the “spirit photograph” which “flaunts photography’s ability to produce an object that could not otherwise be seen, because that object has no existence outside the image” (175).
that each viewer would draw from his/her own experience to determine meaning from the spectacle.

This interplay between what is real and that which is interpretive is present in discourses of the image as well. Baudrillard argues that images are simulations which confuse the differences between themselves and the knowable world and therefore, jeopardize the concept of the real. For him, the simulation “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (3). In Baudrillard’s argument, there is no such thing as the real, but not because all the world is experiential and therefore individual, but rather because simulations and the culture of images have destroyed the real. The world now exists in a hyperreal order which is endlessly self-referencing. He argues that America is invested in “concealing the fact that the real is no longer real” and that “cinema itself contributed to the disappearance of history” (13, 48). Giuliana Bruno also likens the virtual to simulation when she argues that the travel lecture of the nineteenth century, which combined vivid descriptions of the experiences of the traveler with images of landscape and scenery, offered spectators a “virtual journey” (111). Description combined with images creates a simulation of travel for the audience. In these the process of simulation of images destroys what can be considered real.

Jacques Rancière examines the history of images in an effort to discover their relationship to photography, cinema, and what he terms the future of the image. He poses that “the term ‘image’ contains several functions whose problematic alignment precisely constitutes the labour of art” and therefore the image “challenges the concept of any
univocal reality” (1). The image contains a likeness of the original and an alteration of this resemblance. Both of these combined create art. For artistic representation, the image interrogates the nature of the thing it is representing and draws attention to the fact that the thing it is representing is necessarily absent in order for the artistic representation to exist. The mimetic image questions whether it “seems” like what it represents and if the viewer experiences it in a way that mimics the experience of the object (111). The image, then, requires individual analysis and belies any concept of an objective reality.

In addition to the contrast between the real and the romantic, and the real and the image, the real has also been contrasted to the virtual. Gilles Deleuze’s discussion of the virtual might help to conceptualize why this opposition is problematic. Deleuze contrasts the virtual to the actual, but maintains that they are both equally real (209). For Deleuze, the virtual is intrinsically tied to time when thought of in relation to the potential of an object, and it “possesses a full objective reality” in and of itself (279). As the object realizes its potential, it becomes actual and no longer remains virtual. However, Deleuze warns that the virtual must not be confused with the possible because the possible is opposed to the real. The possible offers a multiplication of ideas different from that of the virtual. When one possibility becomes actualized, the possibilities no longer exist. All of the possibilities can never exist, and therefore the possible is in contest with the real. The virtual, on the other hand “is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself” (211). Optics offers a way to understand these differences Deleuze highlights. For example, if a person is viewing a bottle in a concave mirror past the focal point, the image of the bottle is upside down. The virtual image is of an inverted bottle. The
virtual image of the bottle is real for the person viewing it, just as the physical bottle, or
the actual bottle, is also real. They both exist simultaneously, and one does not threaten
the reality of the other. The virtual creates a multiplicity of visions, and this multiplicity
is fully realized in the viewing of the object.

Ann Friedberg similarly argues that virtual images have a “materiality and a
reality” and she locates the origins of how we now think of the virtual in nineteenth
century imaging techniques (Virtual Window 11). She argues that nineteenth-century
technologies created a “mobilized ‘virtual’ gaze” (Window Shopping 2-3). In her
explanation, the panorama, the diorama, and early film all allowed for virtual transport.
They allowed the viewer to experience scenes which were purely image-based and not
physical, and as such offered the possibilities of mobilizing the gaze. The viewer in
London could “travel” to Rome through the image-producing technology of the
panorama. These technologies also had the potentiality to bring “the past to the present,
the distant to the near, the miniscule to its enlargement” (Window Shopping 4). While
my investigation will depend upon a more technical determination of the virtual based on
geometric optics, her concept that the virtual is a product of nineteenth-century
technologies is important for my study. While I am arguing that the language
surrounding the virtual allowed for a proliferation of subject positions, she is similarly
arguing that the democratic experience of vision offered by the diorama and panorama,
and of the arcade and the department store for women, offered new subjects the
opportunity to explore and take ownership of their own interpretations of their gazes.
The language surrounding optics technologies of the nineteenth century provides the terms which I will be using throughout this study. I will be drawing on Deleuze’s theory of the virtual to delineate the divides between real, virtual, and actual experience. The actual assumes the existence in the physical world. The Victorian virtual will be contrasted to the actual, and by extension the physical, but they will both be considered real. The language of optics includes this dependence on the virtual and other concepts, such as composite or binocular vision, which insist that multiple valid visual impressions exist within any concept of the real world. But just as, in this example, a person who is standing closer to the mirror will not see the bottle as being inverted, vision is highly individual. One person’s reality will contain different virtual realities than another’s might, but neither must be wrong. Therefore, when I refer to the “real,” I am referring to the contemporary conceptions of it, which have confused the real for the actual. The “real” draws attention to the disconnect between what geometric optics conceives of as the real and how twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists, such as Green-Lewis and Wood, have come to use it. Throughout the twentieth century, the real often referred to the verifiable, the valid, and the objective. By examining the scientific possibilities for the virtual and the real, I hope to interrupt this language and illustrate moments when the real and the virtual exist simultaneously, and yet are different for different people. Vision, when not complicit with the physical world or with others’ experience, can still be valid.

This distinction between the physical world and valid visual impressions of it becomes especially important when examining the ways that women were described in
the nineteenth century. Representations of Victorian women suggest that good women were invisible. They were ethereal, ephemeral creatures who were well-contained within social structures which regulated their behavior. One of these social structures is the concept of the home. John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* offers a model of the untouchable woman. The wife, or queen, in *Sesame and Lilies* is carefully protected from the muddying effects of the public world through her enclosure in her home and garden. While men must enter the public world and fight for dominance, the woman must stay within the comforts of her domicile. However, any problems that arise in the public world are also the fault of women who are not ordering and regulating the world well enough. Therefore, the woman is figured as carrying her domicile with her wherever she goes (*Genuis* 296-314, *Writings* 154-74). In Ruskin’s concept, in order to remain invisible to the public, the woman must be contained within the social institution of the domestic sphere. This absence from public life is noted by fiction authors as well. For example, in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator notes that “the happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history” (394). In *Aurora Floyd*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s narrator notes that “the perfect women are those who leave no histories behind them, but [go] through life upon such a tranquil course of quiet well-doing as [leave] no footprints on the sands of time” (477). The reference to history, or absence thereof, in both of these passages draws attention to the divide between the “happiest” and “perfect” women and the public world. Additionally, Braddon notes the disembodied aspect of this woman who, although walking in the world, leaves no “footprints.”
Coventry Patmore offers a vivid illustration of the ethereal woman in his poem *The Angel in the House*. Much cited, but still irresistibly useful, this poem depicts a woman who is well-loved by the narrator of the poems. She is courted by the narrator, who eventually marries and has children with her. While the narrator is enthralled by her, he is continually at a loss to completely own her. He asks himself, “Why, having won her, do I woo?” His answer to this question shows that his woman’s ethereal, angelical nature disallows him from fully understanding and possessing her:

> Because her spirit’s vestal grace  
> Provokes me always to pursue,  
> But, spirit-like, eludes embrace…  
> Because, though free of the outer court\(^4\)  
> I am, this Temple keeps its shrine  
> Sacred to Heaven; because in short,  
> She’s not and never can be mine. (1-4; 29-32)

It is his wife’s spiritual nature that holds her aloft from the world. Although she is married, and no longer a virgin, the “Temple” still “keeps its shrine sacred to heaven” and therefore, her spirit is untouchable, even after her body is breached. While the man in this poem is wholly embodied, the model woman is an angel, and therefore disembodied.

Once again, nineteenth-century optics provides a unique way of understanding the divides between the embodied and the disembodied. What was knowable through vision,

\(^{4}\) The outer court and temple are figured as her virginity.
was not necessarily physical. Light waves which are non-material give a model through which to understand this concept. As Lacan points out, light only becomes embodied in an individual’s imagination when s/he views an object through its effects. He claims that “It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects… Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which… I am photo-graphed” (Four Fundamental Concepts 106). Therefore, the disembodied woman of Victorian literature, whether described as an image, fairy, or angel does not necessarily limit her effectiveness in the world, or her ability to form her own consciousness. She exists within a culture where valid visions are not necessarily connected to the physical world. Instead, vision is always, at its root in light theory, a disembodied interpretation.

The significance of the acceptance of this wave theory of light on nineteenth century thought will be explored in the first chapter. Although wave theories of light had been introduced in the seventeenth century, the prevailing model for light was based on Newton’s corpuscular theory of light until the early nineteenth century. Thomas Young and Augustin Jean Fresnel reintroduced the wave theory of light early in the century, and it finally came to be widely acknowledged by the 1830s. By accepting a wave theory of light, and accepting that sight was primarily an “exertion of the mind” and “different in different people,” nineteenth-century scientific philosophers also accepted that sight was not intrinsically tied to any external physical referent (Thomas “Observations” 1). This was an idea that had major implications for cultural thought, as is evidenced by the severe distaste many members of the Royal Society had for the theory for the first thirty years of
the century. In theories of light in which sight had no connection to the physical world, individual perceptions and a multiplication of visual possibilities were justified. As scientific philosophers turned to geometric optics in order to make coherent rules for sight, these rules inevitably included the virtual focus and binocular vision, both of which further proliferated visual possibilities. The virtual focus could manipulate sight in such a way as to make objects appear inverted, closer or further away from the viewer than they were, or multiplied. Binocular vision dictated that each individual is seeing the world through two distinct points-of-view and, through stereoscopy, objects which did not exist in the physical world appear to be “solid”. Yet, a material mode of sight, one which is reliable and connected to an external physical world, was not demolished by these scientific revelations. Instead, visual technologies were used in such ways as to pathologize criminals and find acceptable human “norms.” Within the ideas of fluid sight, characterized by the wave theory of light and a proliferation of visual possibilities, the possibility for accurate understandings of the outside world, or a material vision, still existed. These scientific theories were deployed into middle class homes through an array of visual toys and home experimentation books, and those texts reveal that there was much delight taken in the ability to manipulate vision.

The chapter then turns to a close reading of a passage of *Middlemarch* in which Rosamond Vincy is described in relation to a mirror in order to discover what nineteenth-century accounts of optics might reveal about the description. While the mirror is generally thought to be a indication of the vanity of the character using it, as it is at the beginning of *Far From the Madding Crowd* when Bathsheba looks at herself in her
mirror, George Eliot uses it to allow her narrator to see into Rosamond’s future and to reveal her personality. “Scratches” in the mirror are made to represent the events which compose her life while the candle that sheds light on the mirror represents her “egoism” (195). Because light and mirrors are used to manipulate visual impression, it is possible to read the candle as Rosamond’s light of interpretation but it is also possible to read it as the narrator’s interpretation of Rosamond or even as the reader’s own interpretation of her psyche. Any of these interpretations are valid, and all of them are a product of manipulation. The mirror and light are used to understand Rosamond’s personality, yet this understanding is fluid and never completely defined.

Whereas chapter one examines the meaning created through the narrator gazing upon the female character, chapter two turns attention to the tension that is created between the narrator’s gaze and the female character’s. The chapter examines Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott” in terms of narrative control and the implications for subjectivity of the Lady’s access to vision. While Rosamond is imagined as the light which arranges itself according to microscopic imperfections on the mirror, Tennyson’s Lady in “The Lady of Shalott” is envisioned alternatively as the gazer upon the mirror, who interprets the images she sees, and the glass lens of the mirror itself. The two versions of the poem, the earlier version published in 1833 and the revised version in 1842, change the nature of looking in the poem. Tennyson exerts more control over the visual language employed in the later version. The voyeuristic ability of the narrator, who is able to see and describe the Lady in her tower, in the first poem is eliminated in the second poem in favor of ambiguous descriptions of the Lady and her situation. This
proliferates the visual interpretations present in the reading of the poem, as each reader will envision the work differently. Active interpretation is modeled in the poem by the narrator, the reaper, Lancelot, and even the Lady herself, inviting further involvement in this interpretation by the reader. I argue that, by using this proliferation of valid visual interpretation in the poem, Tennyson challenges the presumption of any external, objective reality. This reading resists other interpretations by theorists, such as Isobel Armstrong, Daniel Albright, Gerhard Joseph, David Martin, and Herbert Tucker, who read the poem as contemplating the differences between what is real and what is illusion.

The Lady’s movement away from the mirror transforms her from the purveyor of the gaze to the optical device itself. After concentrating on a mirror for so long, when she turns away she has a “glassy countenance” suggesting that she is the lens or the mirror through which the people of Camelot must understand themselves and their world (1842: 131). This is a metaphor for the types of interpretation that are being accomplished via female character development in the nineteenth century. Women and their relationship to optics are used to model the possibilities for individual subjectivity in the newly visually oriented world. However, in this position, as the lens through which to envision a world, the woman still remains essentially invisible, like glass, a void to fill as the interpreter desires.

Chapter three explores the paradoxical nature of female “glassiness” as it explores two other types of invisibility in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. While the Lady in “The Lady of Shalott” is hidden in her tower, a type of invisibility that might be called obscurity, Alice fluctuates between being
subvisible, or too small to be seen, and linguistically invisible, or unable to be named. I argue that the tropes of subvisibility and invisibility are influenced by the improved microscope, which was introduced to Victorian scientists by Joseph Jackson Lister in the 1820s, and the rhetoric of the microorganism, which had become part of the scientific vernacular by the 1860s. These concepts increased the possibilities for valid visual interpretations and they became two more visual tropes through which to imagine women’s subjectivity. Yet, constructions of women’s subjectivity which used these tropes offered very problematic ideas. In texts such as John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, women were entreated to remain invisible in public society, yet they were also responsible for the proper maintenance of the social order. This ability to influence without being seen would seem to give women a great deal of power, however if women were too powerful, they risked becoming a danger to society. I argue that Carroll offers a unique solution to this problem. He demonstrates that while Alice finds power in being small and invisible, when she begins to transform into a powerful and devious creature, what I will liken to the twentieth-century concept of the femme fatale, she grows so large that she becomes conspicuous. Therefore, Carroll’s *Alice* texts offer the fantasy that the dangerous Victorian woman is innately highly visible.

Alice’s position is fraught with contradictions. She finds that invisibility gives her power, but in remaining invisible she also risks losing her individual subjectivity. Becoming highly visible does not ameliorate this problem, as becoming a highly visible image also has the potential to remove her from her own subjectivity. I argue that her movement through the rabbit hole makes her a mere projection in a camera obscura.
Similarly, by entering the looking glass she becomes an image. When she is highly visible, she is open to interpretation by others, and is constantly wondering who she has become. Additionally, by losing a connection to her name, such as in the Wood With No Name, she has the ability to easily move through the dream worlds, but she also is subject to assuming an alternative personality or to another character assuming hers. The privileging of the individual and individual experience continues in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, but the end of Carroll’s novels seem to insist on a world of objective and external realities. Alice does not care to distinguish between dream and reality. Instead, she accepts that her experiences may be dreams, but hopes that they are *her* dreams rather than someone else’s. In all of her movements, she hopes to be the powerful figure, but Carroll limits her effectiveness in the dream worlds by dissolving her once again into a childlike ingénue at the end of each of the novels. Her dream worlds in which her individual interpretation is of utmost importance are forfeited for the “real” world, where she is a powerless little girl.

Chapter four brings the theories discussed in the earlier chapters together to explore the ways that women were denied solidity in nineteenth-century imaginations and were instead reduced to mere images: amorphous, transparent voids to be filled with the viewers’ desires. The chapter turns to the technologies of the stereoscope and various motion picture technologies of the late nineteenth century in order to explore the ways that women’s subjectivity were figured visually late in the century. While the stereoscope was introduced by Sir Charles Wheatstone in 1837, the dual-lens stereographic camera was not invented until 1848. In this decade, it was not unusual to
find stereographs where a person was present in one side, but absent in the other. The stereoscope reproduced three-dimensional images, confusing them with the physical objects they portrayed. However, when these images were of people, they often illustrated a world which was constantly in flux. As a woman moves through the field of the stereographic camera, she is captured in one picture, but not in the other. She becomes a representative of the transitory nature of life, a ghostly shadow in the picture. Because this newly envisioned world was constantly in flux, one moment’s experience was no more or less real than any visual rendering of it. The stereograph could reproduce the illusion of solidity but could also reproduce the transitory nature of life in a shadowy blur. It removed the physicality of the subject captured by creating an indexical image of it, but it reinfused the corporeality of the human body in the observer by utilizing the position of the two eyes on the face. As such, it contributed to a visual culture in which visual experience was privileged over bodily experience: a culture ripe for the invention of motion picture.

I further argue that the images of women in early motion pictures were derived from existing nineteenth-century ideologies of female subjectivity. The earliest motion picture studies, from 1893, feature nude female models and clothed male models. Women’s bodies were already imagined as being penetrable by the general public. The earliest motion picture adaptation of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland also demonstrates the ease with which the woman’s body can be separated from her self. Alice Liddell, a real little girl, is made a fiction by the novel, and then made interchangeable by the hiring of an actress to “play” her, and then made a metamorphosing image by the motion picture
technology. Alice loses control over her body and over her selfhood. Additionally, the movement from stereoscopy and other visual technologies which required individual viewing to projected motion picture formalized the process of scrutiny. In early actuality films, the audience watched everyday people who had been captured by the motion picture technology. The ethos created by the audience structure of the projected motion picture is that the general public is the scrutinizer, yet conversely all of its members can be equally scrutinized. The image-based women became the concept through which to imagine the anxieties of subjectivity in a modern motion-picture oriented society. All people could be turned into amalgamous conglomerations of light rays, easily separated from bodily experience and individual subjectivity, yet in this environment, all subjects could also interpret their own visions in new and dynamic ways.
Chapter 1: Shedding Some Light on Sight

In Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* the reader is introduced to Bathsheba Everdene as she surreptitiously removes a mirror from her luggage and examines herself in it. She does so not because there is some imperfection she must correct, but simply “to observe herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind” (14). The moment is what would now be called cinematic. The reader is not watching Bathsheba do this, but rather the narrator describes Gabriel Oak’s perception of her action. Bathsheba does not see Gabriel, and Gabriel is not aware of the narrator or reader. In an orgy of voyeurism, the reader is watching Gabriel watching Bathsheba watching herself. The incident with the mirror, the narrator suggests, reveals something about Bathsheba; she is vain (14). What this could possibly reveal about Gabriel, the narrator, or the reader is not explored. The narrator creates meaning in the relationship between Bathsheba and her looking glass. The mirror had become an important device at this point in Victorian literature. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, Lucy Snow is surprised to discover that the beautiful woman before her in the mirror is herself (234), in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* Alice steps into the mirror and finds the alternative world of Looking Glass Land (127), and in Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” the mirror reflects the road to Camelot to the Lady who is not allowed to look at the world directly (lines 37-54). Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage can be used to analyze all of these instances. The female character confronts the image in the mirror.
and forms the ego ideal (Écrits 2-3). Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory, which was written in the mid-twentieth century, is informed by traditions of texts like these.

Isobel Armstrong notes that the ability to see the full-length body in the mirror was new to the middle classes in the nineteenth century (Victorian Glassworlds 96). The mirror’s use of light allowed for the relationship between the physical world and sight to be confronted. In these literary passages, the image in the mirror complicates knowledge of the physical world. The mirror embodies Bathsheba’s intangible personality, it illustrates the disconnect between Lucy’s psyche and her physical self, the looking glass insists upon the physical nature of the seen phenomenon in the mirror for Alice, and it provides a mediating barrier between the physical world and the Lady’s sight. The powers imbued in the mirror arise from changes in the science of optics which were occurring during the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the possibilities for valid visual experience proliferated. Visual technologies, such as the mirror and the stereoscope, and theories of vision, such as the virtual focus and the virtual image, were instrumental in imagining these possibilities for sight. Changes in understandings of light rays and the availability of the mirror made the expansion of visual experience possible in scientific communities. The mirror and the light ray severed the connection between the physical world and visual perception, allowing people to consider illusionary sight to be “true” or “real.” The mirror allows for the manipulation of light rays, producing images which are not necessarily complicit with the physical world. The very presence of the

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5 In the Lady of Shalott’s case, she is not reflected back to herself. This could be read as a denial of the ego.
mirror doubles objects by reflecting them, producing, at least in visual perception, multiple objects. While scientific philosophers attempted to find explanations for illusion which would create predictable connections between the physical world and the visions produced in observers, these ideas of virtual images and illusions were deployed into the middleclass home through recreational experimentation books and popular science texts. In popular fiction, the presence of the mirror often allows readers to question if light rays reveal a true picture of the physical world, if they reveal something that is invisible, if they reveal falsity, or if they create multiple, equally valid, visions of the world.

The virtual focus, often created via the mirror’s manipulation of light rays, encouraged people to question the relationship between light, sight, and the physical world. The term virtual image was used to describe a visual impression that was created

![Figure 1.1](image)

In these images, the dark blue cubes represent the objects and the light blue cubes represent the virtual images. The virtual focus is the place where reflected rays would converge if they extended past the opaque reflecting surface of the convex mirror. The object viewed in the convex mirror appears small and upright. The light rays are refracted by the curve of the mirror. The negative rays of the refraction meet at a virtual focus beyond the mirror. Therefore, the object seems to exist somewhere behind the mirror, but it seems either much smaller or as though it exists at some distance beyond the mirror. This is contrasted to the reflection of rays in the concave mirror. These rays are reflected towards each other and meet in front of the mirror at what would in the nineteenth century be called a “real” focus (today, this would also be called a virtual focus) producing the virtual image in light blue. The negative rays of the reflection make the object seem to be either much larger or closer to the viewer.
by reflected and refracted light rays. The virtual focus seemed to be a supernatural phenomenon which made objects appear in spaces they did not occupy. The object being seen often occupied a different space than where it appeared (Coddington 211). The virtual focus was the point at which the reflected image would appear if the rays were extended beyond an opaque surface (Society “Optics” 17). For example, objects viewed in a convex mirror appear small and upright. They seem to exist somewhere behind the mirror, so it seems as though they are small because they are a distance away. The point at which this object seems to appear is the virtual focus of the rays. It is the point at which the light rays would converge if they were to continue through the mirror, and it is the point from which the rays seem to be emanating (fig. 1.1). The term virtual has a history in nineteenth-century optics which illuminates the divides between light and sight, vision and the physical world. The virtual image was an optical phenomenon which required the absence of a physical object. In popular texts, the virtual focus and the virtual image were often called imaginary or “optical illusions.” For example, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge calls the virtual focus of a convex mirror the “imaginary focus, because the rays are not actually collected as by a concave mirror, whose focus is called real” (Society “Instruments” 3). 6 Here the “real” focus of the concave mirror is opposed to the “imaginary” focus of the convex mirror. The rays of the real focus actually converge, whereas the rays of an imaginary focus are prevented from

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6 The four articles in this volume are paginated individually, so I will reference them according to the following system: “A Treatise on Optics” will be Society “Optics”; “An Account of Newton’s Optics” will be Society “Newton”; “Double Refraction and Polarization of Light” will be Society “Refraction”; and “An Account of Optical Instruments” will be Society “Instruments.”
converging by the very presence of the mirror. The physical object being seen does not change whether it is viewed in a convex or concave mirror. The visual effect of one mirror is no more real or imaginary than the other. The only thing that changes in the scenario is the shape of the mirror. In the field of optics, then, the term virtual is intrinsically tied to the chasm between the optical world, where appearances are malleable, and the physical one.

By the nineteenth century, British audiences were already primed for questioning the relationship between sight and the physical world. Since the late-eighteenth century, panoramas of exotic places had been popular attractions in London. These massive 360 degree renderings, which would later be complemented by “moving panoramas” or dioramas, offered “the illusion of reality” by allowing the viewer to view them from an elevated position (Altick 128). The illustration itself did not move, but the illusion of time passing was created through the change of light upon the scene. Clearly a London audience could not believe they were looking at the physical space of Rome, however, the image was as close an accurate reproduction of the scenery as was possible. Richard Altick assumes that the popularity of the diorama was due to its ability to reproduce “reality” through the faithful reproduction of scenery. Gillen D’Arcy Wood also argues that the attraction of the panorama was its reproduction of the “real,” yet he notes that the constant and often exhausting production value of the “real” drew attention to the very fact that it was not “real” (3-4, 111). These discussions both assume that for Victorians the “real” was constituted by an accurate representation of what could be seen. However, the explanation of the real and virtual focuses in The Society for the Diffusion of Useful
Knowledge’s *Optics* shows visual reproduction was not considered “real.” The real, in popular science texts, refers to the physical or what we might now call the actual. The real focus in these texts was the place where the light rays “actually” intersected. Many illusions could be created and recreated through manipulation of light rays. While the pleasure in the diorama may have been its accurate and highly detailed recreation of faraway scenery, its correlation to the idea of the “real” that Wood and Altick outline is highly questionable. The panorama allowed an accurate visual impression of a space to be separated from its physical presence.

The relationship between sight and the physical world is complex. The human body sees the material world through the physical organ of the eye. Yet, the eye has no physical contact with what it sees. In the eleventh century, Al-Haythem posed his theory that the eye uses light to see, just as a camera obscura uses light to project images (Lindberg 78-79). The mechanics of the eye and the nature of light are then the two fundamental principles through which optics have been studied. In 1793, Thomas Young, a medical doctor, presented his “Observations on Vision” to the Royal Society. He notes that light from a candle set in front of a mirror seems to arrange itself in a pattern. In his attempt to explain this phenomenon, he introduces three concepts which were commonplace, yet which had the potential to upset the common understandings of optics. He states that “the eye… conveys a distinct impression of those objects only which are situated at a certain distance from itself; that this distance is different in different persons, and that the eye can, by the volition of the mind, be accommodated to view other objects at a much less distance” (Young “Observations” 1). Young’s
discussion is important because it relates the sight produced by the eye to some "exertion" of the mind (Young "Observations" 1). Therefore, the eye cannot see without the active mind. Young also acknowledges that sight is an individual experience, as different seeing bodies have different experiences of vision, severing visual perception from the object viewed. Young’s theory which insists that sight was an individual experience which was indebted to some “exertion of the mind” allows for multiple visual experiences as each individual has a personal sensation of sight. Young’s attempts to explain visual phenomena, such as “that luminous cross, which seems to proceed from the image of a candle in a looking glass” and his attempts to explain the medical aspects of the eye that allow for sight, led him to the study of light, which would further remove vision from the physical world (Young “Observations” 9).

In the 18th century, light, electricity, and heat were all thought to be tiny forms of matter. However, the nature of these forms of matter were unexplainable and so these three types of matter were classified as imponderables. As Henry Smith Williams pointed out in 1904, “this view of the nature of ‘imponderables’ was in some measure a retrogression, for many seventeenth century philosophers… had held more correct views; but the materialistic conception accorded too well with the eighteenth-century tendencies of thought” that it was not called seriously into question until the close of the century (207). As an example, in the seventeenth century Robert Hooke theorized that light is composed of rays of different wavelengths. Hooke proposed a wave theory of light, and argued that the waves had something to do with color. However, Hooke’s contemporary and rival Isaac Newton proposed a corpuscular theory of light which stated that light was
made up of tiny particles. According to Newton, different sizes of particles created
different colors. These particles reacted chemically with objects and adhered to objects
with heat. Each light/color particle adhered to a different temperature, so that those
which adhered to an object with the least amount of force, because the correct
temperature of heat was not present, would reach the eye first. Although Hooke’s theory
was more correct and demonstrable, Simon Ings argues that Newton was more popular at
the time, and so his theory was upheld as the correct theory (221-22). I would argue that
it is also possible that Newton’s theory was less destructive to social values at the time.
The eighteenth-century “tendencies of thought” which Williams references demanded
that sight be reliable, and therefore that it must be connected to some external physical
referent.

Visual surveillance is one symptom of this tendency. Although surveillance
existed throughout the nineteenth century as a way to organize, discipline, and maintain
the English body, the prototypical model of surveillance, the panopticon, was developed
during the late eighteenth century when the corpuscular theory of light was still accepted
as the most accurate model. Sight, therefore was intrinsically linked to the object that
was seen. It was within this atmosphere that Jeremy Bentham wrote “The Panopticon
Papers.” The panopticon is a design for a prison that regulates behavior through
surveillance. In the panopticon, all prisoners are arranged around a central watchtower.
In this design, a single guard is able to watch all prisoners. The prisoners do not know
when they are being watched and when the guard is otherwise engaged, and therefore
must behave well all of the time. Bentham’s design and explanation of the efficacy of the
design relies on an underlying idea of material sight. One of the important aspects of the
design, according to Bentham, is “that for the greatest proportion of time possible, each
man should actually be under inspection… [so] that the inspector may have the
satisfaction of knowing, that the discipline actually has the effect which it is designed to
have” (44). The use of the term “knowing” in this sense suggests that the prison guard’s
eye is infallible. What the prison guard sees is not an illusion, delusion, or interpretation
of events. When the guard witnesses a prisoner behaving poorly, the prisoner is indeed
behaving poorly, just as when the guard sees a prisoner behaving well, he is indeed
behaving well (44-46). Prisoners’ actions are not open to interpretation, nor are they
motivated by external factors in this model. If the prison guard sees the crime, that
means that the prisoner has committed it. Prisoners must understand that the guard’s
sight is all powerful, and that they have no voice to defend their actions.

The infallibility of sight in a society whose main understanding of it was based on
the corpuscular theory of light provides an illustration of how powerful sight was
considered. This theory relied on some material connection between sight and that which
was seen. If colors are particles of light, then color is an absolute. If colors are an eye’s
interpretation of a wavelength, then color is subjective, and models of vision based on
infallibility of sight are at risk. Newton’s theory wrests some of the interpretive power of
the eye and mind from the viewer and places it back in the object. This would be
contested when Young reintroduced the wave theory of light.

In 1797, Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford presented his theory of the
vibratory nature of heat, which paved the way for Young’s experiments with light. While
booring pistols he noticed that vibration caused heat. He experimented with vibration in cool water, and after two and half hours of vibration, the water boiled (Williams 208-215). The newly discovered vibratory nature of heat was not readily accepted, but Young took up the theory and applied it to light (Williams 215). In 1801, he delivered a lecture entitled “The Theory of Light and Colors” to the Royal Society where he theorized, and then demonstrated, that light is indeed a wave. He further showed that different wavelengths of light produce different color sensations upon the eye and that the color lengths of the spectrum were measurable by the angle of refraction (Young “Theory” 143-47, 161). The lecture itself met with hostility. Although Young quoted long passages from Newton’s *Optics* in which Newton himself used undulatory suppositions with which to think about light, Young’s contemporaries viewed Newton as having embraced “a purely corpuscular theory of light without reference to an ether or vibrations” (Sherman 9). Apparently, the Royal Society held Isaac Newton’s theories, or their interpretations of his theories, in high esteem and found it difficult to accept a rival theory. When Young’s lecture was published in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* in 1802 it received a scathing unsigned review which is now attributed to Lord Henry Peter Brougham. “We are sorry to find,” writes Brougham, “that Dr. Young is by no means more successful in making observations and experiments, than in forming systems” (457). Brougham regarded Young’s findings as merely an “inelegant form of the Newtonian experiment” described in *The Opticks* (457). He went on to demand the removal of Young from the Royal Society and the end of the admission of “so many paltry and unsubstantial papers into its Transactions [sic]” (459). Young
defended himself against this attack claiming that “The demonstration… attempted in the
Principia... appears to be defective [sic]” (Young “Reply” 200). He uses other
philosophers to support his conclusions, stating: “If I am not allowed to be a competent
judge, I can quote others, whose authority will not be denied” and might “assist in
lessening the repugnance which every true philosopher must feel, to the necessity of
embracing a physical theory different from that of Newton” (Young “Reply” 200-201).
In this exchange, Young aligns himself with those who feel loath to discredit Newton.
The “true philosopher” he simultaneously claims he is and appeals to, is one who feels
this hesitance but finds he must uphold other theories which can be demonstrated. Xiang
Chen notes that, according to contemporaries, Brougham’s attack virtually stopped the
spread of Young’s wave theory (1). This debate about the nature of light was staged
around Newtonian optics, but the vehemence with which Brougham rejects Young
coupled with the general refusal to acknowledge Newton’s own musings about the
undulatory nature of light suggests that there was more at stake than the validity of a
favored philosopher. Young was not the only one who faced this difficulty.

A similar controversy took place in France nearly fifteen years later. In 1815
Augustin Jean Fresnel presented the results of experiments he had conducted to the
French Institute. His experiments also revealed that light is a wave (Ings 224-25,
Sherman 9-10). While the French Institute similarly rejected the idea of a wave theory of
light, favoring Newton’s corpuscular theory, Dominique Francis Arago, Fresnel’s mentor
who was an acquaintance of Dr. Young, encouraged Fresnel to continue his research. At
this time Young had removed himself from public philosophical discussions of optics,
but he was still actively working in the field. In a letter dated October 4, 1817 Sir David Brewster inquires: “I write you at present chiefly to ask if you have any objections to have your theory of colours produced by the action of crystals upon polarized light mentioned as your own” (Brewster “4 October 1817” 367). Brewster’s mention of “your theory of colours” makes it apparent that Young was still experimenting, theorizing, and publishing his experiments, but he was uncomfortable attaching his name to his work. He refused permission to be named as the author, but warns Brewster not to send “any information that you are not prepared to have mentioned again, for I am always scribbling something anonymous” (Young “10 October 1817” 369). Young maintained a healthy, if sometimes contentious, correspondence with Arago, Fresnel, Brewster, and others in which experiments were shared and theories were challenged. These communications eventually led to wider acceptance. By 1823, the French Institute and the Royal Society had both admitted the value of the wave theory of light, and by 1825 it was accepted by many.  

The vehemence with which the Royal Society and the French Institute both rejected any theory of light that displaced Newtonian corpuscular theory is interesting. Young and Fresnel drew on past theorists, notably Robert Hooke and Christiaan Hyugens, who had proposed similar wave theories. These theories were opposed by Newton, and were largely ignored. Young and Fresnel were not simply ignored: they were threatened, cajoled, and ridiculed. The rejection of these theories is puzzling in

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7 The wave theory was reintroduced to England by John Herschel in the late 1820s (Chen 1).
light of the experimentation that accompanied them. Since the corpuscular theory of light was one that was indemonstrable, it would seem as though any theory that could be demonstrated would have been a relief to societies dedicated to the advancement of truth and science. However, the staunch opposition Thomas Young faced is tied to the cultural implications any acknowledgement of his theories might have.  

The Newtonian theory described light as a “‘corpuscular emanation’ or fluid, composed of shining particles of heat, which enter into chemical combination with the particles of other forms of matter” (Williams 207). This chemical bond is then released from the object and bounced back to the eye, allowing for the production of sight and color for the eye. In this theory, the object that is being seen has a direct relationship with the eye and the way a person perceives the object. A part of the object’s own chemical and material substance has bonded with light in order to produce an image of that object for the eye. In this explanation of sight, the object “looks” this way and therefore “is.” The look is tied to its physicality. The corpuscular theory of light ties the truth of an object to the object itself, rather than to human interpretation. In many ways this version of sight is reminiscent of the early Greek theories of the eidola, or films released from matter to produce visible impressions on the eye (Ings 156). In wave  

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8 I do not wish it to appear that Young was the only one in England working on such experiments. I highlight Young as a case study to demonstrate the contentious nature of opposing Newtonian optics in the early Nineteenth Century. Other British explorations of the field at the time who are not mentioned in this chapter include James Woods Elements of Optics, James Ferguson’s Lectures on Select Subjects in Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, and Optics, and J. Jordan’s Observations on Light and Colours (Society “Instruments” 60). I should also point out the David Brewster, Richard Potter, and Henry Brougham’s writings all show that through the 1830s they did not endorse the wave theory.
theories of light, there is no part of the object that actually reaches the eye in order to be seen. Instead, light reflects off objects in different ways according to different measurements of refraction. Instead of receiving absolute values of the object, the eye must interpret different wavelengths in order to see objects. This can be a disturbing idea of light and sight. If sight is only tangentially related to the objects being seen, then the observer is interpreting everything. What one observer sees may be a manipulation of wavelengths, and may not be the essential truth of the object at all. Terry Eagleton notes that this “imperial sway” of interpretation produces a Kantian dilemma. The more the individual interprets everything he feels, hears and sees, the more any concept of a singular, objective reality is demolished (70). The unease Kant has with the disconnect between the objects being viewed and the sight produced in the viewer invites several questions that plague nineteenth century arts and continue to challenge us. The discomfort that arose with the emergence of theories of light and sight is characterized by these questions:

If everything is a representation of the world, then seeing becomes just a representation. If I cannot apprehend the world directly, but can only perceive representations of it, then where exactly am I, and where, exactly, is the world?

(Inggs 180)

These types of queries which question representation, an individual’s relationship to reality, and the reliability of sight had been pondered since Plato’s allegory of the cave, yet the new understandings of light and sight did not eliminate these questions. If anything, they only complicated them further.
The discomfort with the individual’s relationship to sight is evident in other discourses which took place throughout the century. Gillen D’Arcy Wood points out that Academy style and Romantic artists were viciously opposed to what he calls “reproductions of the real” such as the panorama and, later, the photograph. The true artist, according to the academy, begins with the presupposition that there is a difference between art and nature. Pleasure is associated with appreciation of those similarities the artist has worked to create and those which he has not. According to Wood, these artists did not consider a copy of nature to be “art” (4). The perception of the individual is contrasted to the actual in this debate about sight and art which occurred early in the century. The interpretive powers of the trained artist’s perception are privileged over the sight of the average person, who must therefore see the world like “everybody else.” In this construct, the artist’s very job is to interpret sight in ways that others cannot. The artist can perceive things that elude others.9 So, before scientists had accepted the wave theory of light, and with it the more fluid version of sight, artists were already participating in discourses about the verity of sight and subjective powers of perception.

These discussions about the efficacy of sight and the interpretive powers of the individual were still prevalent in mid-century. John Ruskin addresses this issue in the third volume of Modern Painters. He introduces “two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians,—namely, ‘Objective,’

9 Perhaps the Romantic artist’s vehement rejection of the panorama was the democratization of perception which made the artist’s job superfluous. If everyone was constantly interpreting everything and there was no vision of the “actual” then everyone had the eye of the artist.
and ‘Subjective’” (Genius 61-2). He defines subjective as “the qualities of things which thus depend upon our perception of them, and upon our human nature as affected by them” and objective as “the qualities of things which they always have irrespective of any other nature” (Genius 62). These two terms are still very much in use today, and mean very much the same things. At this point in his career, Ruskin finds “subjectivity” egotistical, shallow, and selfish and explains that “the term ‘Blue’ does not mean the sensation caused by a gentian on the human eye; but it means the power of producing that sensation” and that since the gentian “generally looks blue to most men” if one does not perceive it as blue “you will say simply… that something is the matter with you” (Genius 63). Therefore, the effect on the viewer is not privileged over the “reality” of the object itself. The gentian has the power of producing the blue sensation and therefore must be correctly termed blue. The flower is not defective if viewers do not see it as blue, but rather there is something wrong with the viewers if they cannot see the “truth” of the object. Sight, in this argument, is intrinsically tied to the object being seen rather than the seeing body. Objective truth, truth in the material nature of objects in the world, is the only truth that exists for Ruskin. Everything else is fallacy.¹⁰

In order to re-contain these disturbing questions of individual perception, the British nineteenth-century field of optics concentrated on the study of the eye, the organ

¹⁰ This is from whence his discussion of the pathetic fallacy arises. The pathetic fallacy occurs, according to Ruskin, when a poet is so excited by his own emotions that he sees them on the nature around him. This “confessed fallacy of sight” is beautiful when it accurately describes an emotion, but Ruskin warns that first rate poets use it only when moved by great emotion. Second-rate writers use it often because they have “faulty” sight all of the time.
which rendered individual perception undeniable, less and instead focused on geometric optics, or mathematical calculations for light. Henry Coddington’s *A Treatise on the Reflexion and Refraction of Light being Part I of a System of Optics* is dominated by mathematical equations attesting to the geometric properties of light rays. There is very little text to accompany the many pages of complex equations which will illuminate the field of optics for the students for whom he is reportedly writing (fig. 1.2). Coddington’s system reveals his trust that mathematics will explain light in such a way that any irregularity in sight can be explained through geometry rather than differences in perception. Yet, while he trusts that mathematics will eliminate differences of understanding, his entire project seems incomprehensible as he admits that “the student who undertakes to learn Optics from this Work without assistance, will probably soon find

![Figure 1.2](image)

These are various expressions describing how light interacts with different shapes and objects.


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11 Studies of the eye continued, but these were generally confined to medical studies and not studies of optics. This is in contrast to European studies of optics which included theories about the eye even in the early nineteenth century.

12 Coddington may analyze the eye and mechanics of vision much more in the part II, “A Treatise on the Eye and Optical Instruments.” Unfortunately I have not been able to locate this volume.
himself arrested by difficulties” (iii). Sir David Brewster’s *Treatise on Optics* begins by stating that “Optics… is that branch of knowledge which treats the properties of light and of vision, as performed by the human eye” (1). However, in his 377-page treatise, only one eighteen-page chapter is devoted to the eye. Sir George Biddell Airy uses mathematical equations to explain the relationship between light and sight. In his discussion of the polarity of light, he begins with a basic expression. He poses that the “radius of a spherical surface be $c$” and “the distance of the retina from the lens be $c + a$” (227). This begins simply enough, however, by the time he is finished the mathematics of sight is much more complicated. He poses that if “the eye is too near to see the lines of colour distinctly… the expression for intensity in this case is:

$$2 - G \left( \frac{z a}{\lambda e} \cdot \frac{c l}{a} - g \frac{ch}{a} \right) \cdot \cos \left( \frac{z a}{\lambda e} \cdot \frac{c l}{a} - g \frac{ch}{a} \right) + G \left( \frac{z a}{\lambda e} \cdot \frac{c l}{a} - g \frac{ch}{a} \right) \cdot \cos \left( \frac{z a}{\lambda e} \cdot \frac{c l}{a} - g \frac{ch}{a} \right) - R$$

” (238). The attempt to simplify the concept exacerbated the complexity. While these treatises all attempt to explain the behavior of light and sight so that all “imaginary” phenomenon are given scientific explanations, any geometric account of light rays must necessarily include an account of concepts, like the virtual focus and polarity, that challenged the connection between sight and the physical world.

In 1838, Sir Charles Wheatstone introduced his theory of the phenomenon of binocular vision, which encouraged the reintegration of the physiology of vision into accounts of optics. However, the physiology of optics still remained slightly separated from other optical studies. In 1853, C. Mansfield Ingleby explained that “the science of
Optics is usually discussed under two heads, viz., Physical Optics [geometric optics] and Theoretical Optics [which explores the nature of light]... Beyond the sphere of these two branches of optics lie all speculations respecting the process and laws of vision…” (1). Wheatstone’s theory of binocular vision further multiplied the possibilities for perception. He observed that, due to the distance between them, the two eyes each perceive objects slightly differently, and that “the mind perceived an object of three dimensions by means of the two dissimilar pictures projected by it on the two retinæ” (373). Sir David Brewster argued that Wheatstone’s was an already well known theory, saying that “it is inconceivable on what ground he could imagine himself to be the discoverer of so palpable and notorious a fact as that the pictures seen by two eyes—two points of sight, must be dissimilar” and cites Euclid and Aguilonius as earlier observers of this (The Stereoscope 18n1, 13). It is probable that the fact that each person’s two eyes perceive physical objects slightly differently was well-known yet little remarked upon. However, Wheatstone was the first to put this theory to use by recreating three-dimensional vision through his invention, the stereoscope. In the stereoscope, each eye is presented with a slightly different image which, when viewed simultaneously, are perceived as one three dimensional object. In this construction of vision, even a single individual’s sight is composed of multiple visions. Three-dimensional vision is possible through two different images of a single solid object perceived together. The stereoscope made it possible to see two different drawings as one three-dimensional solid object, thereby tricking the eyes into perceiving an object which did not exist. Not only were
light rays and refraction responsible for multiplying the possibilities for vision, but even the human body relied on multiple visions through which to perceive the world.

The more these scientific texts may have made the behavior of light and the production of images predictable, the more they alternatively verified that many possibilities for visual impressions exist with mirrors, light, reflection, refraction, polarity, and even human physiognomy of binocular vision. A fluid understanding of sight, one which is characterized by the ability of light rays to produce visual impressions which do not have a physical analogue, allows a multiplication of visual possibilities. However, it does not eliminate a mode of sight which is intrinsically material, or connected to the physical world. Instead, the possibility for a vision which is an accurate reproduction of the physical world exists within this fluid mode of sight. Institutions of visual surveillance, especially those that relied on advanced optical technologies, which existed late in the nineteenth century illustrate the continued possibilities for a material mode of sight.

Composite photography is one method of visual surveillance which was intrinsically connected to both the physical world and some underlying truth. In 1883, Sir Francis Galton published *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. In it, he outlines his revised method of composite photography and describes its uses. Composite photography was a method by which many photographs would be taken on a single film. The photographs were of a specific group of people. For example, all thieves from a prison could be photographed using the same film. With each exposure, those characteristics which were common between the subjects were reinforced, while those
which were not would appear lighter and lighter until they nearly faded away (6-12).

Composite photography allowed the physical anthropologist the ability to see only the common features in a group. Ronald Thomas suggests that Galton’s use of composite photography illustrates the underlying idea that a “higher reality of an abstract yet authentic human norm” exists (154). This norm was contrasted to the many abnormalities found in society. Galton outlines the different uses of his composite photography. Similarities in families and similarities in the genders at different ages are seemingly free from pathology. However, he also outlines uses for composite photography in identifying characteristics of criminals, consumptives, and various ethnic groups.

In 1890 Havelock Ellis used the composite method to outline the physical features of criminals in his book *The Criminal*. The third chapter of Ellis’ book, “Criminal Anthropology (Physical),” describes the various physical characteristics which are supposedly common amongst the criminal class. The chapter is divided into eight subsections which discuss cranial and cerebral characteristics, the face, anomalies of the hair, criminal physiognomy, the body and viscera, heredity, motor activity, and physical sensibility. Within these subsections things like “outstanding ears,” “ape-like agility,” and “left-handedness” are discussed in exhaustive detail and many illustrations and photographs are used in order to assist the lay person in understanding these physical characteristics of parts of the criminal body. Similar methods were used by Hugh Diamond, William Acton, and Désiré Charnay to catalogue madwomen, prostitutes, and aboriginal people (Nancy Armstrong 212-16). In Paris, Alphonse Bertillon devised a
system of recording and identifying known criminals using cards with their photographs, physical descriptions, and abbreviated notes about their person (Sekula 18). Allen Sekula notes that Bertillon and Galton “constitute two methodological poles of the positivist attempts to define and regulate social deviance. Bertillon sought to individuate… Galton sought to visualize the generic evidence of hereditarian laws” (19). Yet both attempts, along with those of Ellis, Diamond, Acton, and Charnay, are working within the same set of assumptions: first, a scientific study of physical characteristics of people could be accomplished through reproducing their images and, second, people's images are intrinsically connected with their personalities. Others could see this physical marker of one’s nature with enough practice. Therefore, by training the eye through photographic method, one can see the reality of another’s nature. Bertillon’s criminal identification cards suggest that the reality of the criminal can be contained within the photograph and snippet of information captured on the card.13

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13 Even twentieth-century discussions of the panopticon exhibit several different possibilities for the vision of the political subject within the prison. In “What is a Picture,” an essay from Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan explains how the interpretive act of sight can immediately be turned into an understanding of surveillance. The recognition of one’s own active gaze immediately alerts one to the active gaze of others. In understanding how to interpret a picture, one immediately must realize that the active gaze of others “turns me into a picture” (126). The gazer interprets the subject of representation only to find that the subject is gazing back. This idea is demonstrated in Discipline and Punish when Michel Foucault explores Bentham’s design. First, he explains that this design for a prison contrasts sharply to the public torture that criminals had to endure prior to a penal system. While Foucault points out many political reasons for the shift from public abuse and execution to prison, there is another explanation for this shift. Foucault, writing at a different time from within a different society, takes a more fluid approach to the vision necessary for Bentham’s design. Foucault argues that seeing criminals tortured created sympathy for the criminal in the public. The government, or the sovereign, had to change the way that people were punished because empathy with the criminal brought governmental authority into
While a material mode of sight, vision as an indication of the physical world, existed within a more fluid mode of sight, marked by multiple valid visions and individual perception, the two sometimes had an uneasy relationship. The tension between the two poles of understanding of sight, one marked by the compulsion to describe sight as interpretive and the other to render it absolute, is demonstrated in nineteenth century discussions of art. Walter Pater and John Ruskin express varying opinions of the nature of sight for the artist. In 1873, Walter Pater expressed his position question (59-62). The problem for the government here is not one of faulty sight, but one of faulty interpretation of sight. The masses, who are uneducated and therefore not sophisticated interpreters of their own sight, are sympathizing with the wrong party. Instead of sympathizing with the sovereign, whom the crime is against, the public sympathizes with the criminal who perpetrated the crime. In reading Foucault it seems that he believes the design was useful for the government because it took the interpretive power of sight away from the unruly masses, and instead gave it to a government sanctioned interpreter, the guard. However, Foucault goes on to say that the guard in the panopticon is actually superfluous. The design relies on the invisibility of the guard. Therefore, the prisoner internalizes the eye, and regulates his own behavior (203). Here, it seems that Foucault integrates the material and fluid modes of sight and subject. The guard is superfluous because in a Lacanian move the prisoner understands that he is being observed which allows him to internalize the eye and become a performer. If the guard is actually superfluous, then the panopticon is regulating the “real” actions of the prisoner. Foucault’s explanation of the superfluous guard presumes that the prisoner’s actions are not open to interpretation or motivated by outside factors. Instead, the prisoner is well behaved. In this model, the prisoner can also only be acting well-behaved. The prisoner’s internalized eye functions much like Descartes’ intellect behind the physical eye; both are mechanisms of interpretation. The prisoner must understand what “good” behavior physically looks like and, conversely, what “bad” behavior looks like. Instead of behaving well, the prisoner must only make sure that the guard viewing his behavior must not interpret his actions as bad behavior. Therefore, the prisoner must perform as a “well-behaved” prisoner, but he does not necessarily have to be a well-behaved prisoner. In Foucault’s analysis, then, the prisoner is the one with interpretive, and by extension performative, power, and the government sanctioned guard is really just a dupe of the system. Bentham, writing in the 1770s, worked with a much more material understanding of sight while Foucault, writing in the 1970s, approaches that writing combining a fluid, or interpretive, and a material understanding of sight.
on the purpose of art in his most well-known text, *The Renaissance*. Pater, much like the “Romantic artist” that Wood discusses, sees the artist as one with superior feeling and interpretation. The effect of art on the individual is privileged over any arbitrary distinction of truth or reality. For Pater, good art produces pleasure and the true artist is not one who possesses “a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but [instead possesses] a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects” (1095). While philosophy attempts to freeze art in time so that others may understand it, Pater argues that art is meant to give high quality moments, and moments only, of pleasure to the individual witnessing the art. In Pater’s estimation the affective quality of art on the individual is the most important part of art and beauty. Therefore, the world is full of images which individuals experience in different ways. In this construction of art, there is no objective “truth” or beauty.

As has been previously discussed, John Ruskin did not ascribe to the idea of a “subjective” vision of the world. However, he was not consistent with his belief throughout his career. In *Modern Painters* Ruskin’s position on fluid and material sight fluctuates. He wrote *Modern Painters* in five volumes over three decades and his position on what an artist’s job should be and how the artist should see the world changes over the course of these many volumes. As John D. Rosenberg notes, “*Modern Painters* would be less perplexing if Ruskin had known more about art when he began it, or learned less in the course of its composition” (18). Rosenberg attributes Ruskin’s ambivalence about many of the ideas he expresses to increased knowledge throughout his writing career. This may be an astute observation, but his contradictory attitudes at
different moments of writing could also be informed by his changing attitudes toward sight and subjectivity. In the first volume, written in 1843, he writes that “the truth of nature is not to be discerned by the uneducated senses” (Genius 23-25). In this volume he is invested in arguing that the artist and the art critic are necessary because they are trained to be discerning in their sight. Seeing, for the purposes of discerning truth, must be active and interpretive. Therefore, sight is largely an individual and interpretive act. However, thirteen years later, in his third volume, he contradicts his earlier statement. Instead of actively viewing the world and then interpreting it for a viewer, he argues that, “a man who can see truth at all [an artist], sees it wholly and neither desires nor dares to mutilate it” and that “all the great men see what they paint before they paint it—see it in a perfectly passive manner” (Genius 56-7). In his first volume, Ruskin is much more open to the idea of a subjective vision of the world. The artist and art critic are better interpreters of their sight, and therefore can create more moving paintings. In this first volume objective “truth” is rarely explored. However, by his third volume, his ideas about sight have changed. Instead a person’s sight must have some material connection with the physical entity which is being seen. It should be experienced passively with no active interpretation on the part of the viewer. Therefore, the “great artist” is one who can reproduce what is “really there” rather than one who can create the best interpretation. Here sight has become objective for Ruskin, and differences in perception can no longer be tolerated.

The many possibilities for sight are illustrated by optical toys made for the Victorian middleclass home. These show that the public was ready to consider the
interaction of light and perception. The home theater box, for example, used transparencies with time markers such as sunrises and moons behind transparent foregrounds (Altick 200, 231-33). The basic concept illustrated in this toy is that the passage of time is marked by changes in light and that the same scene looks different in different light. The magic lantern used light, transparent slides, and smoke to project images in a darkened room to produce phantasmagoric displays. This showed that light could produce images which had no physical analogue. When held to the light, the kaleidoscope made different colors morph together through turns of the cylinder, showing that manipulations in light could make images appear to be in flux. Phenakistiscopes, Faraday Wheels, stroboscopes, and zootropes all made a series of still images appear to be in motion when spun. All of these visual toys were common in the Victorian household and they allow the viewer to manipulate visual perception (Crary 96-136; Altick 230-34). In many of these devices, sight is disconnected from any physical reality, yet this does not make the visual experience any less authentic.

Scientific understandings of optics were deployed into the public through these toys and through various texts available to middleclass households. Sir David Brewster and Sir Thomas Young both wrote treatises on optics which were for leisure reading and private study. Brewster’s was part of The Cabinet Cyclopaedia series, one which sold for six shillings and was advertised to middle class households.¹⁴ One such advertisement for the Cabinet Cyclopaedia states that, “In the more abstruse and technical departments of

¹⁴ Morse Peckham notes that this price suggests that “Lardner was aiming at the middle-classes and intelligent and fairly prosperous ‘operative’ and tradesmen rather than the general working-classes” (42).
knowledge, an attempt has been made to convey to the reader a general acquaintance with these subjects by the use of plain and familiar language, appropriate and well-executed engravings, and copious examples and illustrations, taken from objects and events with which everyone is acquainted” (Advertisement Sheet in Brewster’s *Optics* 2). Scientific texts were written as “non-technically as possible” so as to be accessible to a large audience and consumers could purchase one “cabinet,” or subject area, without purchasing the entire collection (Peckham 40-42). The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge also released a volume titled *Optics* which contained four shorter volumes: a treatise on optics, an account of Newton’s Optics, Double Refraction and Polarization of Light, and an Account of Optical Instruments. This volume in particular is suited to a wider audience who had not been trained in complex geometry. Instead of equations, the Society’s “Treatise on Optics” utilizes fifty-five figures and diagrams in order to illustrate the theories.

While the purpose of these family library editions seems to be to offer scientific explanation for all visual phenomenon, at times these explanations only seem to prove that multiple valid visions of the world can be created with light rays and visual technologies. For example, in Society’s “Treatise on Optics” chapter explaining the phenomenon of the mirage, the following example is given (fig. 1.3):

![Figure 1.3](Image)

On the 1st of August, 1798, Dr. Vince observed at Ramsgate, a ship which appeared as at A, the topmast being the only part of it that was seen above the horizon. An inverted image of it was seen at B immediately above the real ship A, and an erect image at C, both of them being complete and well defined. (57)

The accuracy with which the example begins is important. This is being described as a valid and trustworthy account of what a reputable witness, Dr. Vince, saw on a very specific date. Rather than this visual phenomenon being discredited as Dr. Vince’s delusion, the scientific explanation for his mirage is given. The illusion of three boats, two floating in air and in various states of inversion, when only one was sailing and that one was clearly upright, is due to light refracting through moisture in the air. As the light which was bouncing off of the ships refracted through the haze, it bent downward to meet Dr. Vince’s eye. The eye simultaneously saw the actual ship through un-refracted rays, while seeing the refracted rays which met at point x and crossed. Those inverted rays were followed to their virtual focus to see an inverted ship on the horizon. Then, light which was being refracted at a different angle which did not cross, allowed the eye to follow the rays to their virtual focus to see the upright image of a ship far above the horizon.

Figure 1.4
Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. 1826-1848. Optics. 1830. pp. 58. RB 700804. This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
(fig. 1.4) (Society “Optics” 58). This lengthy explanation uses geometric optics in order to explain that this phenomenon is natural and authentic. These professional and popular science texts show that within a more fluid and interpretive understanding of individual perception, there was still a compulsion to mathematically and mechanically explain sight. Yet, despite the insistence that this perception is scientifically explainable, and therefore predictable, the three different images of the ship are perceived simultaneously, and this is a valid visual experience. The writers insist that Dr. Vince really did see these images, and that there is a clear and scientific explanation as to why he saw them, yet those were not visions which were complicit with the physical world. Virtual focus in this instance leads to optical illusion. Instead of one ship, a viewer could see three. Moisture in the air could make ships appear inverted, floating in air, or upright in their actual position, and any of these perceptions could be considered as correct and accurate as any of the others, and, in fact, all three could be perceived simultaneously.

Experimentation with optical devices was crucial to the development of optical sciences. Whereas Kepler and Al-Haythem used the camera obscura as a model for the eye (Ings 163-169), Xiang Chen argues that, in the early nineteenth century, practice in optics consisted not only of using theories to explain or predict optical phenomenon, but also in manipulating optical instruments to explore the world (xx). The theories demonstrated in optical instruments were translated into understandings of everyday life. Although today one might not think of mirrors as optical devices, the “three classes of mirrors… plane, concave, and convex” were crucial to understanding the way light reflected off of surfaces and came to be used in other more complex devices (Society
“Instruments” 2). These devices allowed the possibilities for sight to proliferate. The periscopic, or compound, microscope and the camera obscura both used mirrors, the former to allow one to examine a specimen which is outside the direct line of sight and the latter to upright inverted images. Any surface or substance was liable to be used for demonstration in explanations of optics for popular audiences. Water was considered a lens due to its ability to “collect or disperse the light transmitted by it” (Society Instruments 4) and was used to produce “optical illusions” in which objects appeared to be where they were not due to the refraction of light rays (Badcock 74-5). Isobel Armstrong points out that with the new availability of glass “reflection and translucency created a new order of perception in the everyday” (Victorian Glassworlds 95). Instructional books explained how one could make recreational and scientific optical devices at home. David Brewster’s A Treatise on New Philosophical Instruments for Various Purposes in the Arts and Sciences with Experiments on Light and Colours explains how devices such as the micrometer and the telescope work and gives diagrams showing what one would look like if it were to be taken apart. The Society for the
Diffusion of Useful Knowledge’s “Optical Instruments,” which is geared toward a wider reading public, begins with much more basic optical devices such as mirrors and lenses, before explaining more complex amusements, like the magic lantern. Gabriel Wolfenstein argues that in the nineteenth century science was “done by everyone” (245). These texts, and others like them, show that theories of optics were entering homes and were not limited to the scientists who were using them in experimentation. Mirrors, water, and glass all allowed ordinary people to experiment with the bending of light rays, showing the ways that perception of the physical world could be manipulated (fig. 1.5).

John Badcock’s Philosophical Recreations or Winter Amusements provides wonderful insight into how commonplace these visual entertainments were. This book offers instructions for different experiments which might amuse the reader. These amusements range from removing stains from cloth to performing card tricks to building magic lanterns. The book contains an entire section on optics. The explanation of optics in this text removes the human eye from the equation, defining it as “a science, explain[ing] the nature of vision, by investigating the causes of various phenomena that arise from the reflection and refraction of light” (124). In this explanation, the human body is hardly responsible for sight, and instead the study of optics is reduced to its exploration of light rays. The text explains how one can construct a magic lantern and

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15 John Badcock is not credited, but his initials appear at the end of the preface. The full title is Philosophical Recreations or Winter Amusements: A Collection of Entertaining & Surprising Experiments in Mechanics, Arithmetic, Optics, Hydrostatics, Hydraulics, Pneumatics, Electricity, Chemistry, Magnetism, & Pyrotechny, or the Art of Making Fire Works, Together with the Wonders of the Air Pump, Magic Lantern, Camera Obscura, &c. &c. &c. and a Variety of Tricks with Cards. On its cover page it claims to be “simplified and clearly elucidated so as to suit every capacity.”
make fantastic images appear using smoke and mirrors. An image painted on a transparent screen contained inside a box can be made to appear floating above the box in a cloud of smoke. This image has no analogue in the physical world as it is only an image on a glass, yet it can be seen (160-63). When one’s visual experience is not consistent with the physical one *Philosophical Recreations* calls this an illusion.

The knowledge that light rays could produce illusion was commonplace in the popular imagination. Therefore, sight is intrinsically connected to illusion. Water and mirrors are used in one of the experiments in *Philosophical Recreations* which creates one such illusion. The article instructs readers to fill a glass bottle to its neck and cork it. When the bottle is placed beyond the focus of a concave mirror, it appears inverted and the water seems to be at the bottom of the inverted bottle. When the bottle is turned upside-down, it appears upright in the mirror (fig. 1.6). If the bottle is uncorked while in this position, the water empties from the bottle, but in the mirror it appears as
though the water is flowing upwards (125). Refraction of light in the concave mirror can make water appear to flow against the law of gravity. Illusion is powerful when it changes the perception of one’s own body. When standing in front of a concave mirror, for example, one appears inverted. The article titled “Another Optical Illusion:—Refracted Motion” encourages the reader to find a concave mirror, stand in front of it, and reach out a hand. When doing so, the concave mirror makes it seem as though another hand is reaching back (125-26). The article does not explain why this happens nor does it reference the scientific principles of the angle of reflection and the virtual focus which makes this possible. The material experience of the body allows for the illusion to be complete. As one must know that she is not standing upside down in front of the mirror and must recognize the disembodied hand as her own, her visual experience is completely severed from her physical one. Yet the visual experience is no less real to the viewer than the material experience. The correspondence between the self and the visual experience is called into question by these experiments. The experience echoes the Kantian dilemma that everything, even one’s own sight, is reduced to a representation of the world. However, while Simon Ings and Terry Eagleton interpret this as an uncomfortable dilemma, these books illustrate a pleasure in the ability to manipulate sight. There is no such thing as direct experience when even the human eye has no connection to the perception of one’s own body and, in this instance, separates the body from the physical world. Yet, this is an experience to duplicate at home for entertainment. This is not horrifying; it is good fun! An authentic visual experience of
the world included illusions, manipulations, and multiple visions and it was not necessarily connected to any physical reality.

What has been termed “real” then, may have too narrow a definition for discussions of 19th century optics. Jennifer Green-Lewis takes up this argument in her book about nineteenth century photography. She argues that the Romantic artist was no less representing the real than were the photograph or the realist novelist who would emerge later in the century. Instead, she argues, what literary and art critics now term realism and romanticism were both invested in representing reality, but they were looking at the world through different lenses. According to her, romanticism is actually just another form of realism seen through the lens of the romantic artist’s metaphysical interpretation of an external world. She offers the term positive realism as opposed to romantic realism rather than maintaining the traditional binaries of romanticism and realism (13-36). Perhaps, then, what was so appealing about these home experiment books which allow for manipulation of perception is that they demonstrated ways of literally seeing the world through different lenses, opening the experimenter to the possibility of multiple and various visions of the world. They showed that reality in sight is easily altered by motion, light, and various transparent substances, and therefore that individual perception need not be tied to any narrow physical plane of perception.

Jonathan Crary argues that nineteenth century visual toys are bound up in non-veridical

16 In fact, the photograph was often used to distort reality by using lighting and focusing techniques that would distort or change the image. See for example Nancy Armstrong’s example of the “spirit photograph” which “flaunts photography’s ability to produce an object that could otherwise not be seen, because that object has no existence outside the image” (175).
theories of vision, are therefore at odds with realism, and destroyed any sense of the “real” world (14). Instead I would argue that these visual toys opened the experience of “reality” up to a more fluid and interpretive array of visual options. They participated in a tradition of dual realities of positive and romantic realism that Green-Lewis outlines about photography, and encouraged even more perceptions of reality. If one was no longer tied to a physical truth, one could re-imagine his/her own reality. The real world was composed of an array of authentic individual perceptions, and each individual could have an array of authentic perceptions simultaneously.

Here I return to Young’s attempt to explain “that luminous cross which seems to proceed from the image of a candle in a looking glass” (Young “Observations” 9). He states that “This is produced by the direction of the friction by which the glass is commonly polished: the scratches placed in a horizontal direction, exhibiting the perpendicular part of the cross, and the vertical scratches the horizontal part” (Young “Observations” 9). In this explanation, light and the reflective properties of the mirror are revealing a physical characteristic which would otherwise be hidden from the viewer. So, while light and mirrors could trick the eye when refracted, it could also reveal that which was obscure. One could argue that visual philosophy entered public imagination simply from the presence of these experiment books which were published for a wide readership. This argument is made stronger by the echoing of these scientific theories in literature.

In Middlemarch, George Eliot uses an explanation of candlelight in a mirror, which echoes Young’s, as a metaphor for Rosamond Vincy. Although there is no
evidence that Eliot was familiar with Young’s work, it is probable that she would have been exposed to it. Young originally published this observation about the “luminous cross” in the mirror in 1793, but, in the boom of popular interest in optical sciences, it was reproduced in 1855. Eliot began Middlemarch in 1869, and her narrator draws on Young’s theory of reflective luminescence. The narrator notes that a mirror which has been rubbed by a maid “will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun” (194-95). The formation of the reflection of light is produced by some physical flaw in the mirror itself, which is caused by physical contact, just as it is in Young’s explanation. This moment in the novel shows that optical experience had entered popular imagination. Laws of vision, which proliferate in scientific texts, become organizing principles in literature and prose. Here, the organization of candlelight is “a parable.” The narrator explains that the scratches are “going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement” (194-95). In the novel, the narrator defines the terms of the parable as the arrangement of events so that Miss Vincy would meet her future love interest, Mr. Lydgate. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that mirrors are used in Victorian writing in order to see one’s self. For women writers, they argue, this can mean seeing oneself differently than others see one. While this could create a liberating space for women, the frame around the mirror acts as an enclosure, once again containing the unruly women (3-44, 71-78). This explanation of mirrors does not account for the popular science rhetoric surrounding mirrors. As we
have seen in contemporary professional and popular science texts, mirrors were used to bend light, reveal items which are outside the direct line of sight, and manipulate visual perception of the physical world. The mirror in this passage reveals nature rather than reflects self, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest. Rosamond does not see herself in it, rather the narrator uses it as a prescient crystal ball. The narrator peers into Rosamond’s future. However, the rules informed by experimentation in light theory at work in the analogy can also be used to interpret the passage in several different ways. Rosamond Vincy could be described as a physical entity. She is the mirror, without flaw at first glance, but marred by scratches, or imperfections in character, when viewed in a different light.¹⁷

The prescience of the mirror can also be used to penetrate Rosamond’s psyche. Maintaining the terms of the parable that the narrator outlines, “the scratches are events, and the candle is [her] egoism,” another analogy may be drawn (195). The effect of the concentric circles may be the role in which Rosamond envisions herself in her world. She has a persistent ability to see her role in the world differently than others do. For example, when Lydgate insists that they let the Plymdale’s take their house and move to a smaller one, Rosamond thwarts the plan, withdrawing the commission from the solicitor (479). The larger house is, in her mind, necessary to her existence in order for her to play the role of “Doctor’s Wife” in the town of *Middlemarch*. She sees the arrangement of events in her life according to the rays that her own understanding shines upon them. The reader is aware that these “scratches” are not the only ones that exist, and therefore

¹⁷ Eliot is fond of using the mirror as a metaphor for the inner workings of her female characters. Vanity and self-obsession are often alluded to by possession and use of mirrors for Gwendolyn Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* and Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*. 
that Rosamond is seeing her own projection of light rays reflected back to her. The narration is structured in such a way that Rosamond is made to appear incorrect in her assumptions. The narrator gives us glimpses into her psyche, and into the underlying causes for events, and sways the reader to read Rosamond as flawed. This parable offers another explanation. The reader is persuaded that the narrator can see all of the scratches and bears no prejudice by his omniscience, or the ability of his narratorial eye to rove over everyone in the town. However, the narrator can also be yet another candle, throwing light onto the events in a way that makes sense to him. His candle may be presenting the “luminous cross” while Rosamond’s is highlighting the concentric circle. The narrator’s perception of Rosamond could be manipulated by the very mirror which is invoked to reveal truth. Rosamond may be a mere virtual image, occupying a different space, made smaller or larger, or inverted by the light rays in the mirror. Here, it is clear that laws of vision became metaphors through which people could understand themselves in the world. The popular metaphor in this passage is that things seem different in a different light. Light, therefore, represents different points of view, none of which reveal a “truth.” In this metaphor, the narrator is also just another luminary object in front of the mirror. His construction of Rosamond may be no more accurate than Rosamond’s is of herself.

These various explanations of the mirror metaphor both reflect and mimic the optical sciences. The various ways that the candlelight and mirror can be understood in terms of the plot and character which drive the novel are similar to the multiple visions which were possible through scientific understandings of optics. Just as Dr. Vince saw
multiple ships in different positions through simultaneously refracting light rays, there are many understandings of the world available to the reader of *Middlemarch*. However, in the account of Dr. Vince’s ships, his vision is related to the physical world and is mathematically calculable. When discussing Rosamond’s relationship to her world, nothing is an absolute. There is no physical world with which to contrast her vision of herself. Yet, in the text of the novel, her understanding of herself in her world is no less real than is Dr. Vince’s visual experience. She sees herself as occupying a specific social space which others, the narrator and Lydgate, do not see her occupying. Rosamond is explained to the reader through a metaphor of sight: one which arises from an experiment that could be easily duplicated by the reader at home. *Middlemarch* recalls those home experiment books which allow the reader to create optical devices, microscopes, dioramas, magic lanterns, etc. with which to understand the world. Perceptions of Rosamond, and perception of one’s own self, could be manipulated and multiplied through the use of these optical innovations.
Chapter 2: Shadows and Light: Reflecting on the Lady of Shalott

Of all the capacities of a poet, that which seems to have arisen earliest in Mr. Tennyson, and in which he most excels, is that of scene-painting, in the higher sense of the term: not the mere power of producing that rather vapid species of composition usually termed descriptive poetry—for there is not in these volumes one passage of pure description: but the power of creating scenery, in keeping with some state of human feeling; so fitted to it as to be the embodied symbol of it, and to summon up the state of feeling itself, with a force not to be surpassed by anything but reality. (Mill 86)

John Stuart Mill wrote this praise of Alfred, Lord Tennyson in 1835, two years after the first publication of “The Lady of Shalott,” and seven years before its revision would be published. The Lady of Shalott is a powerful figure of the nineteenth century, as is evidenced by the various images, both paintings and photographs, which artists generated depicting her, Elaine, and the Lily Maid, all alternative names for the spurned lover of Lancelot. Tennyson himself would return to the pathos of the story and retell it in verse in “Lancelot and Elaine” in 1859, and his refashioning of Arthurian legends would remain a staple of his poetic career. The regeneration of the story of the maiden of Scalotta coupled with the proliferation of images which were generated depicting her, suggest that the various versions of the Lady character were interchangeable, and the narratives were not as important as the image that enjoyed its own life in artistic, and
presumably popular, imaginations. Mill claims that Tennyson “excels in scene-painting” and that this scene-painting requires more than describing setting and landscape. Tennyson, in Mill’s estimation, can create an entire experience which is not only visual, but also emotional. For Mill, the setting he creates becomes a visual symbol of “human emotion,” and this is intrinsically distinct from reality. Mill cannot maintain his delineation between the real and the unreal as he claims that the “agency [of the poem] is supernatural, [but] the scenery… belongs to the actual world” (88). While feeling and emotion are deemed as unnatural as the mythic curse which will descend upon the Lady, the descriptions of scenery are, according to Mill, actual. Yet, the scenery is not actual. Tennyson’s poem does not describe an actual place, person, or event. Instead, the poem further mythologizes an earlier legend. The Lady of Shalott is a fiction, but if there ever were a Lady of Shalott, the multiple narratives told about her life would work to separate her from her “reality.”

The play between supernatural and actual, reality and image, which is present in both Tennyson’s poetry and Mill’s review of it, is reminiscent of the ways that light and vision were discussed in popular science texts. Images seen were not always complicit with the physical world. For example, in 1824, John Badcock teaches his reader that for “amusement” the reader can trick someone into believing that they are being paid two coins, when the reader really only leaves one. He explains how to do this with simple optics. He explains that if the coin is placed in an inverted conical glass which is half-filled with water, the coin will appear as two because the coin is seen “through the conical surface of the water, at the side of the glass, and through the flat surface at the top
of the water, at the same time; for the conical surface dilates the rays, and makes the piece appear larger, whilst the flat surface, only refracts them, and occasions the piece to be seen higher up in the glass, but still of its natural size” (74-5). The appearance of the coin does not accurately portray the physical world and, perhaps most importantly for the indebted person, the actual amount of money that has been left. This illusion is accomplished, and explained, through the knowledge of light rays and their ability to refract and dilate through transparent surfaces. In 1829, Henry Coddington explains that virtual images seem to appear behind or beneath mirrors through the “reflexion and refraction” of pencil rays of light and that “nothing but the loss of light attendant on the repeated reflexions… can distinguish the real object from its unreal associates” (211-12). In 1830, The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge explained that compound and periscopic microscopes use a combination of lenses and mirrors to displace images which are outside of the natural line of sight, but that “in the vision of objects through single microscopes we look at the real object; but in all compounds, however perfect their construction, we only see a magnified representation or picture of the object, which it is evident in point of accuracy cannot be relied upon with the same confidence as a magnified view of the object itself” (“Instruments” 39). In these accounts mirrors, water, and lenses create “appearances,” “unreal” images, and “pictures” of actual objects that are not necessarily consistent with their physical existence. These texts were all available to non-specialist readers, and it is probable that Tennyson was familiar with these, or other texts like them, which discussed the science of optics and the proliferation of illusions that could be created with the use of various devices. The use of the Lady’s
mirror to displace images, or “shadows,” of the road leading to Camelot reflects the types of discourse which engaged in the differences between the “real” and the “unreal” images that were perceived when using mirrors and lenses. While vision which was manipulated by mirrors and lenses did not always correspond to the physical world, the science behind the manipulations made these illusionary visions valid visual interpretations.

David Staines claims that Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” is based on a medieval novelette entitled Donna di Scalotta (9). The original story describes the daughter of the “great Barbassoro” who falls in love with Lancelot. Lancelot, of course, is in love with the queen Ginevra, and the daughter dies of a broken heart. As she expires she asks to be lavishly adorned and set in a barge which will be conveyed to Lancelot’s residence. She writes a note which is attached to her bodice; it blames Lancelot for her death and wishes good health to the other knights (Roscoe 45-46 qtd. in Staines 9-10). The points of departure from the source text are as important as those items Tennyson chooses to keep. Staines points out that “The Lady of Shalott” “studies the Lady’s isolation in her tower and her decision to move into the living world, two subjects absent from the novelette” whereas Tennyson minimally explores the Lady’s physical appearance in death and her reception at Camelot, which are very important in the Italian original (10). Staines argues that Tennyson’s points of departure are due to his attempt to distance himself from the source text (11). However, Tennyson’s reticence to describe the Lady and his addition of the most important elements of the poem’s narrative, the mirror, web, and curse, when read in conjunction with contemporaneous popular optics texts, indicate a much more nuanced version of literally “looking” at the world.
In both renditions of the poem, there are many constraints employed in order to limit both the reader’s and the Lady’s sight but, through the reproductive effect of the mirror and its ability to displace images through the use of the virtual focus, eventually these constraints collapse and the possibilities for vision proliferate. The very presence of these multiple versions of the poem serve as a metaphor for the various visions. Tennyson used the nine years between the two versions of the poem to re-envision the Lady of Shalott. As in his adaptation of the source text, what Tennyson chooses to change or to expunge from the 1842 poem is just as important as what he decides to keep. Tennyson’s visual language is more controlled in the revised version, yet the revised version does not limit possible readings, but instead allows for a wealth of interpretive possibilities. James W. Wood has argued that the poem calls for reader interpretation in “ambiguous lines which must be read one way or another each time [readers] encounter them” because these lines “demand a reader who participates with the poem in creating meaning” (60). The poem models visual interpretation through the voices of the narrator, the Lady, the reaper, and Lancelot. Tennyson creates multiple visual enclosures which are all rendered ineffectual by the scientific logic of the mirror which demands the multiplication and distortion of vision. The eventual breakdown of all of these enclosures illustrates the impossibility of regulating sight. Rather than suggesting the correct reading of the poem, the many possibilities for the poem require the reader to become an active interpreter, modeled upon the active interpreter of the visual world.

Tennyson uses multiple enclosures for the Lady in the poem, which seem to limit the Lady’s active interpretation of and participation in the outside world. Tennyson’s
heroines often experience enclosures. Mariana is stuck in a rotting and rusting cottage, Oenone wanders forlornly in her vale, Claribel is literally buried in the earth, and the female soul must reside in a solitary Palace on a rocky crag in “The Palace of Art.” These enclosures are indicative of a discomfort with the social “place” of women. In these poems, the women are removed from society, and often lament the distance between themselves and others or a specific other. Gertrude Himmelfarb notes that Tennyson’s poetry draws on a tradition of separate spheres where “the home was [women’s] domain, their natural, proper, separate sphere” (667). Himmelfarb is discussing The Princess and Idylls of Kings, but it is possible to read “The Lady of Shalott” as referencing the domestic sphere as well, as The Lady is forced to perform the domestic task of weaving. While the walls and towers in the poem are the most obvious enclosure, one which will be discussed shortly, the most visually appealing is the enclosure that the mirror provides. As has already been explored, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the paradoxical nature of the mirror which is at once a liberating space for women characters and an enclosure which limits their effectiveness. The mirror allows the woman to see herself differently than others do, and therefore to reimagine herself, but whoever this alternative imagining of herself becomes is wholly contained within the frame of the mirror (3-44, 71-83).

The mirror can also be used to showcase women’s vanity, as it does in George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda or Thomas Hardy’s Far From the Madding Crowd. Others have read the mirror in the “The Lady of Shalott” as a device which the Lady uses to envision herself. Daniel Albright mentions “the Lady of Shalott’s narcissism” which he claims
still remains in Tennyson’s “Elaine and Lancelot,” yet Albright does not show where he finds specific reference to this narcissism in “The Lady of Shalott” (34). Alan Sinfield argues that the Lady is trapped in the Lacanian mirror stage where she is weaving an idea of a coherent self from her image in the mirror, but this illusion of coherence is broken when she attempts to form an identity by turning away from the mirror towards language and entering the society of Camelot (68-99). Both of these readings rely on the Lady’s examination of herself in the mirror. However, in “The Lady of Shalott” the mirror is used to reflect the world to the Lady. In the 1832 version, the reader is told that “before her hangs a mirror clear,/ reflecting towered Camelot” (1833:49-50). In this version of the poem, the only images that are captured in the mirror are those of Camelot. Therefore the Lady is not using the mirror for vanity or for reinvention. Albright argues that the Lady exists within a camera obscura, where a small aperture lets in just enough light to allow images to form against a reflecting wall (38). While this is an apt description of her space, the function of the mirror changes the imagery. Rather than a lens which focuses the image, a mirror reflects the image. The mirror is used much more like it is in the compound and periscopic microscopes, or a compound camera obscura, which used mirrors to upright inverted images. The mirror displaces an image which would otherwise be out of the line of sight for the viewer. As we recall, this displaced image seen in the compound microscope was called the virtual image. In the language of nineteenth-century optics, the Lady is accessing the virtual image of Camelot rather than directly viewing it.

18 Please note that, because the two versions are being cited from a “side-by-side” comparative publication, they will be referenced as the following (year:line numbers).
While the Lady’s sight is restricted by the mirror, as she only sees the world through it, the mirror logically multiplies the possible visions of Camelot in the diagetic of the poem. As Gerhard Joseph points out, “because a mirror relies on reflection, there can be a mirror image of a mirror image—indeed, there can theoretically be an infinite series of reflections of reflections of a single putative original” (“Echo and Mirror” 409). Therefore the actual Camelot is confronted with the virtual image of the town as it is multiplied by the reflective quality of the mirror. These reflections can be displaced, distorted, and endlessly repeated. The presence of the mirror inspires further multiplication of images as well through image production, as “[the Lady] has heard a whisper say,/ a curse is on her if she stay,/ to look down to Camelot” (1842:39-41). In this line the importance of “looking” is highlighted as she cannot look down to Camelot without the aid of the mirror. The curse prohibits her looking to Camelot, but it does not prevent it, as we see in Part III of the poem. It is not the act of looking that is prohibited. Instead, we are told that the trigger to the curse is the staying of her weaving.¹⁹ She must weave both “night and day” (1833: 40; 1842:37). Therefore, she is prohibited from looking directly at Camelot only incidentally, as it would cause her to pause her weaving. She must compulsively reproduce the vision of Camelot she sees in the mirror. She is forced to continually, actively interpret the world, demonstrating a fluid and active mode of vision. Yet, the reader is forced to question if her interpretation of the world can be accurate. Just as in the compound microscope, she is not reproducing visions of the objects, but instead is reproducing images of the objects in the mirror. The mirror

¹⁹ This is more clear in the 1833 version. The lines read “A curse is on her, if she stay/ her weaving, either night or day,/ to look down to Camelot.” (1833:39-41).
necessarily inverts images. The actual Camelot is also described as subject to the doubling and inverting of a mirrored gaze as “on either side of the river lie/ long fields of barley and of rye,” an image that inverts itself across the river, and the “the knights come riding, two and two,” a doubling effect in the passers by (1833:4, 61; 1842:4, 61). This complicates the concept of the mirror in the poem. The mirrored gaze is not just a product of faulty perception. Even the physical scenery of Camelot is reflected back to itself. The narrative itself demonstrates an inversion of courtly love. While “A redcross knight forever kneel’d to a lady in [Lancelot’s] shield,” the resolution of the poem ends with the image of the Lady prostrate before the knight (1833:78; 1842:78). The mirror duplicates and inverts the images and the very logic of the poem.

Tennyson changes the way he introduces the mirror for his revision of the poem. While in the 1833 version of the poem, the narrator tells the reader that “before [the Lady] hangs a mirror clear,/ reflecting towered Camelot,” in the revised poem, “moving thro’ a mirror clear/ that hangs before [the Lady] all the year,/ Shadows of the world appear” (1833: 49-50; 1842:46-48). This change makes the function of the mirror more ambiguous. Rather than towered Camelot, the mirror reflects shadows of the world, but what exactly that world entails is not clear. The earlier version of the poem is by no means unambiguous. While it may seem that the narrator is explaining the mirror as reflecting the town of Camelot to the Lady, Gerhard Joseph has argued that the craft function of the mirror, as the mirror “would have been necessary for the Lady to see the design being woven,” is more evident in the earlier poem (“Echo and Mirror” 408). In his reading, the mirror is reflecting the towered Camelot which has been woven into the
tapestry. However, in the later version, the shadows which are being reflected in the mirror allow for more interpretive freedom. As Herbert Tucker has stated, the Lady’s mirror “is so ambiguously positioned, especially by 1842, that it may reflect the objects beyond her casement, or the obverse of her tapestry, or both” (106). The ambiguous placement of her mirror in the 1842 poem does not preclude the narcissistic readings of the Lady as the 1833 poem does. When shadows of the world appear in the mirror, it is possible that she is also seeing herself in that mirror as one of those shadows.

The change from the word “reflection” to “shadow” also signals a point of reference from a classical work. Tennyson’s newer choice of words recalls Book VII of Plato’s Republic, commonly called “The Allegory of the Cave.” The men in the cave who have lived all their lives with their heads chained to exclusively look forward “see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave” (208). When one of these men is brought out of the cave, he “will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows” and when he is at last able to “see him as he is in his own proper place… he will contemplate his own nature” (209-10). Plato’s story is one of self-discovery which can only take place through enlightenment. The allegory also explores the relationship between the experiential and the actual. Plato questions if that which society names through common understanding is just a shadow of a deeper reality which is hidden from immediate view. Tennyson’s invocation of “The Allegory of the Cave” creates a connection between the two works, and many have argued that the dichotomy between what is real and what is not is the crux of the poem. In Victorian Poetry, Isobel
Armstrong argues that the mirror “breaks down the opposition between art and reality” (86). Daniel Albright argues that “the Lady of Shalott left her room out of a frustrated desire to immerse herself in the real” (34). Gerhard Joseph has contended that the Lady “is trapped within a clear cut dualism, wherein the mind confronts not the ‘real’ but rather its imitation—a ‘shadow’ or ‘mirror’ of the real” (“Victorian Weaving” 26-27). David Martin claims that the “mirror within a mirror refraction [of Lancelot reflected in the river reflected in the mirror] so complicates the question of reality that in a frantic attempt to escape all intervening perspectives, the Lady turns from her mirror to look directly at Lancelot” (255). Herbert Tucker claims that “the Lady remains in thrall to secondary shadows of reality” (106). In these readings, the “real” world which Plato discusses is interpreted as the town, road to, and society in Camelot which the Lady has never experienced. The shadows which the men in the cave experience are, in the poem, the virtual image produced by the displacement of the mirror.

Rather than participating in conversations which pit a singular reality against illusion, Tennyson’s poem may be challenging the idea of any external reality. The Lady is not chained; she compulsively interprets and recreates what she sees in this un-real recreation of the world, her magic web. This constant weaving at the loom, when read in context of Plato’s writing, can be read as a commentary on the state of image production at the time. The constant production of false images creates confusion in understanding the world. Yet, as sighted and thinking beings, people cannot stop interpreting sight. The wave theory of light and the interpretive quality of sight illustrated that each person constantly interprets everything s/he sees. Therefore, the interpretation of vision is itself
a process of mimesis, representing to the viewer that which s/he can understand.

Tennyson’s concern with individual reality through personal experience is present even in his very early works. In *Oi Péovtes*, a poem that was originally published in *Poems of 1830* but was omitted in later versions, the poet claims that “man is the measure of all truth unto himself” and that “nothing is, but all is made” (3-4; 12). In these lines, each man deems what is true through his own experience. Nothing is objective, or “is,” but all things are “made” through an active interpretation of the outside world and events. The narrator of the poem further argues that “if I dream that all these are,/ they are to me for that I dream” (13-14). This line exhibits a privileging of an individual experience of reality over any objective or collective experience of it. Using this earlier poem as a lens through which to read “The Lady of Shalott,” it seems that what is “really” happening or what things “really” look like is not important. The Lady only understands the world through her own visual interpretation, but this representation is already removed from direct experience, much like all sight is removed from the physical world. In the diagesis of the poem, the Lady is removed from direct visual experience by both the interpretive quality of her sight and her dependence on the mirror to reflect images to her. What is important is the Lady’s experience of her life, and, in this poem, her experience of her life and the outside world is primarily visual.

This removal from direct experience of the world alienates her from her own sight. The mirror functions not only to reflect Camelot to her while she sits at her loom, but it also prevents her from being seen by the people of the town. In the 1833 version of the poem, the presence of the Lady is known, as “the reaper, reaping late and early,/ hears
her ever chanting cheerly,/ like an angel singing clearly” (1833:20-22). The image of the angel is a powerful one. The angel is a being who cannot be seen. The reaper goes on to whisper, “‘tis the fairy/ Lady of Shalott” (1833:26-27). Here, the lady is an ethereal creature, alternatively an angel or a fairy, unseen by human eyes. Her voice alerts the people to the fact that she exists, but she is mythic in the town. Her very voice transforms her into a supernatural being, as she becomes a fairy when she is heard. Angels are intrinsically invisible and fairies are magical and changeable, but Tennyson makes her visual absence in the town more complete in his revision. Instead of simply calling her an angel, the narrator asks, “who hath seen her wave her hand?/ Or at the casement seen her stand?/ Or is she known in all the land…” (1842: 24-27). The answer is once again that the reaper “hear[s] a song that echoes cheerly” and “whispers, “‘Tis the fairy/ Lady of Shalott” (1842:30, 35-36). In both of these versions, visual knowledge of the Lady is replaced by aural knowledge of her, showing that, while the mirror allows her to see Camelot which is out of her direct line of sight, it does not allow the people of Camelot to see her. Tennyson uses her aural presence to make the Lady even more aligned with the supernatural as he changes the syntax of his sentences in the revised version. Rather than the reaper hearing her while he is working “beneath the moon,” in the 1842 poem the reaper hears her “by the moon” (1833:25; 1842:33). Herbert Tucker points out that “since the word ‘by’ has occurred in each preceding stanza to specify place (4, 13, 19), the syntactic promotion of the phrase ‘by the moon’ encourages us for a

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20 In 1854 Coventry Patmore would use this imagery to describe the wife in *The Angel in the House*. In his poem, the wife is figured as an angel, one who is an ethereal being, equally un-picturable, existing in a liminal space between the house and heaven.
moment to imagine that the Romantic song of the Lady has transported the reaper into ‘uplands airy’ that lie outside of this world” (105). In addition, the whispers of the reaper show alternative consciousnesses to the Lady’s and the narrator’s. Alan Sinfield argues that the questions the narrator poses to the readers “suggest other positions, other consciousnesses than the Lady’s,” but the response of the reaper to the Lady’s singing in the 1833 version of the poem accomplishes the same task (103). The narrator does not mistake her for a fairy, but the reaper does. The reaper’s response to the Lady models interpretation, showing an alternative point of view. Just as the Lady’s experience forms her reality, so too does the reaper’s experience of the Lady form his reality.

This has a strangely alienating effect on the Lady. In being known only aurally, the Lady becomes disembodied. In “What is a Picture” Jacques Lacan argues that the gazer becomes alienated from himself as soon as he realizes that he is a picture for others. He instinctively knows that others are not seeing his real self, but are instead seeing his projected image, or image screen (Four Fundamental Concepts 105-107). For Lacan, then, the act of others seeing one has an alienating effect. In this construction, the Lady would be in the ultimate position as an active viewer. She is able to continually see and interpret others without being the object of sight. However, the reflexive act of looking also has a validating effect on the viewer. The viewer knows that he exists because he exists as the object of sight for an other. For the Lady, when the gaze reflects back to her, she does not visually exist for others and, if the mirror is placed so that it is displacing the

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21 Tucker goes on to point out that this is a romanticized moment in the poem, where the reader momentarily forgets that “the reaper remains bound to a sublunary existence, where the harvest moon means nothing more romantic than an opportunity to extend the workday past sundown” (105).
image of Camelot for her, she may not even see herself in the mirror. Carol Christ argues that in “Mariana,” “Tennyson builds into the poem a blurring of subject and object that leaves ambiguous its organizing principle” (59). At first glance, it seems that “The Lady of Shalott” has a clearly defined subject and clearly defined objects of vision, the Lady is the perceiving subject and those on the road to Camelot are the objects of her vision, yet this does not disambiguate its organizing principle. This is perhaps because, upon closer examination, the division of subject and object is not so clear. The narrator and the reaper both interpret the Lady in various ways. The reaper calls her the “fairy/ Lady of Shalott” and the narrator’s voice explains her to the reader (1833:26-27; 1842:35-36). Later in the 1842 version of the poem, Lancelot will also interpret the Lady as having a lovely face (1842:170). To the reader, as well, the Lady is the object of perception, as is evident in the criticism which overwhelmingly focuses on the Lady and her position in the poem. In a Lacanian reading of the text, the Lady’s ability to interpret without ever being interpreted by others, and her ability to exist without a visual persona, allows her a great amount of freedom in her interpretation and reproduction. However, there is a more complex negotiation in this poem between subject and object. As Joseph Chadwick notes, the Lady depends on the images in the mirror both to stave off the curse and to affirm that she exists. She is dependent on her weaving to affirm that she exists because she cannot cast her own shadow, or reflection, onto her mirror (17-18). The compulsory weaving of the sights of the outside world in the magic web coupled with Lancelot’s affirmation that she has a lovely face suggest that, instead of a clear delineation between the two, there can be no subject without an external object to perceive it and there can be
no object without a subject to perceive it. But, although she is unseen by the people of Camelot until after the curse has descended upon her, she is not always entirely invisible when she is in her tower.

In the first version of the poem, the narrator has a voyeuristic tendency to see her even when she is in her tower. While she is weaving, “A pearlgarland winds her head:/she leaneth on a velvet bed,” and she is “fully royally appareled” (1833:33-35). When she finally leaves her tower to find a boat, “a cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight./ All raimented in snowy white/ That loosely flew, her zone in sight,/ Clasped with one blinding diamond bright,)” (1833:127-30). These images of the Lady are startling because they avoid describing any personal aspect of her. The narrator does not describe her hair, skin, or eye color. She does not have big eyes, or delicate features, or cherry lips. She is not graceful, clumsy, fair, or ugly. She is wealthy. She is royalty. She has velvet, pearls, and diamonds, but she is void of any individual and personal distinction. She does not even have a name, but is instead referred to simply by her title. She is the Lady of Shalott. This first poem uses these descriptions to clearly designate a class status for the Lady, suggesting that perhaps this dilemma of vision, the compulsory interpreting, is a class problem. In the later versions the first description is replaced by a more extensive description of the reaper’s activity and the second description is not replaced at all; instead the poem remains one stanza shorter. Perhaps Tennyson removed these descriptions to remove the suggestion that class barriers prevent the Lady from visually participating in the world of Camelot. Perhaps he thought that this class barrier was still alluded to by her title, “Lady,” and by the very fact that she is in a tower. Isobel
Armstrong argues that, due to Chartist sympathies Tennyson “deprives the Lady of her luxurious surroundings, and the opulence of her clothes… as if to make sure that she was not identified with the aristocratic luxury of the people surrounding Lancelot, the exploiters of labour” (“Mythography” 84). Effectively, this class distinction from the first poem serves to act as another enclosure for the Lady. She is in a different class than the village churls, market-girls, shepherds, and pages she sees on the road to Camelot, and is further removed from any experience of those lives (1833 & 1842:52, 53, 57, 58).

There are other visual restrictions the Lady experiences while she is embowered on her island, but the most obvious of the enclosures in the poem are the physical ones that house the Lady. She is on the island of Shalott, surrounded by water, and housed in “Four gray walls and four gray towers” which “overlook a space of flowers” (1833:15-16; 1842:15-16). In the first version of the poem, the island is described as being verily covered in flowers. It is surrounded by “The yellowleaved waterlily” and “the greensheathed daffodilly,” and “The little isle is all inrailed/ with a rose-fence, and overtrailed/ with roses” (1833:6-7; 1833: 29-30). The only flowery imagery that remains in the final version of the poem is that of the space between the towers. Carl Plasa argues that the four towers represent the phallus which overlooks the female “flower.” This representational scheme would suggest that the male gaze is both directed towards the woman and that it is inadequate in understanding the woman as it “overlooks,” or fails to apprehend, her (256). His reading is intriguing. The way the setting is described does seem like the layers of female genitalia. The carefully protected fortress in the middle is surrounded by layer after layer of blossoms. In this reading, the close relationship
between the island of Shalott and flowers can be an indication of her gender. Therefore, the flowers which surround and cover the island indicate that the curse is specifically female. However, Tennyson removes these flowers from his final version. He replaces the description of the daffodils and water-lilies which surround the island with: “up and down the people go,/ Gazing where the lilies blow,/ Round an island there below” (1842:6-8). What becomes important in this description are the people walking to Camelot, and the fact that they gaze at the island of Shalott. Alastair Thomson points out that the first part of the poem presents the world’s idea of the fairy Lady, an unseen presence whose island towers draw the gaze of those who pass to and from Camelot” (41). This turn to the idea of the gaze indicates, in as early as the first stanza, that this poem will somehow involve critical engagement in what it means to “look.” It also draws attention to the invisibility, or hidden nature, of the Lady as those who pass gaze at the island but never see its chief inhabitant. Instead, all they see are the lilies blowing. Just as the description of her velvet bed and pearlgarland-ed head is replaced with descriptions of the reapers, so is the description of the rose-fence. These moves to describe Camelot, the road to Camelot, and the people in Camelot more extensively, create further distance between the Lady and the rest of the society. They also allow the reader to “envision” the island more fully, allowing each reader to envision his/her own version of the island, thereby contributing to the proliferations of vision possible.

The removal of the flower imagery from the poem also serves to highlight the juxtaposition between the Lady of Shalott’s enclosed world and the vibrant outside world.

22 Joseph Chadwick and Carol Christ read the poem as gendering the artist as a female.
by creating a color barrier between the island and Camelot. The 1833 poem discusses the yellow and green of the flowers which surround the island. In the 1842 version of the poem, the island is only surrounded by “willows [that] whiten” (1833:10; 1842:10). White is the absence of color, but here it is more absent than even the color white, as whiten refers to the turning of the willow leaves in the wind. Therefore, whiten is used here as a verb rather than as a color. The only color associated with Shalott throughout the 1842 poem is the gray of the walls and towers which enclose the heroine. Although the flowers in the space between the grey walls and towers hint toward a brief relief of the drab space, Tennyson creates an atmosphere which seems to swallow the Lady in the drab grayness which prevails in her tower. The people who appear on the road to Camelot are much more vividly described. The market girls wear red cloaks, shepherd lads have curly hair, and long-haired pages are crimson clad (1842:52, 57, 58). Tennyson suggests that the Lady is made to feel this juxtaposition between the colorful outside world and her colorless enclosed life when he describes the web she weaves. In his first rendition, he describes the web as “a charmèd web,” but he changes this to “A magic web with colours gay” for the 1842 version (1833:38; 1842:38). The charmed web becomes an indication of the only way the outside colours enter the grey-space of Shalott, through the “shadows” of the world that appear on her mirror which are reproduced in the Lady’s weaving.

The only item of color described in the tower is the web, the rest is merely a reflection. Once again, this recalls the ways that color and light waves were being discussed at this time. Rather than being materially connected to an object, scientific
philosophers and, through popular science texts, the public understood light as the product of light wave refraction. Different waves that refracted at different angles produced different color sensations for viewers. These sensations were individual interpretations of these light waves. Ruskin rails against “subjective” vision, which would allow different interpretations of color for the same object and urges that a gentian should be called blue because it has the power of “producing” this color sensation (Genius 61-63). The Lady’s weaving participates in this discourse about light and color. The colorful web, which is the only vividly colored object on the island in the 1842 version, is a product of her interpretation. The mirror provides a reflection of the world, thereby further removing the Lady from the physical world of Camelot. Her interpretation, as it is so individual, cannot be accessed by anyone else. Even the narrator never describes the web in any detail. This recalls the Kantian dilemma of sight. The seeing subject “requires some Other to assure itself that its powers” of creating and interpreting the world are “more than hallucinatory;” the Other that can validate an individual visual experience destroys the individual, and yet the individual cannot exist without the Other against whom the individual must be situated (Eagleton 71). Kant’s understanding of individual interpretation makes the subject dependent on the object of sight. While, just as in Lacan’s theory of the image screen, the object of sight, Kant’s “Other,” threatens to dislodge the seeing subject’s interpretive ability. Yet the subject requires the Other to confirm his/her interpretation. The Lady is caught in this dilemma. As long as she remains on the island immersed in her virtual image and interpretation, she remains individual but absent from any physical reality of Camelot. As soon as she
enters the physical world, by looking directly at it and then descending from the island to the town, her individuality dies.

This reading of the poem as an allegory of light and sight in the nineteenth century is further strengthened by the many instances of light imagery Tennyson employs. In the 1833 version, Tennyson describes the island as bathed in light as “sunbeam-showers break and quiver” over it (1833:11). In his revision, he changes the sunbeam-showers to “little breezes” (1842:11). This is important, as throughout the revised poem he controls the light imagery so that it is associated with Camelot rather than Shalott. “Sunbeam-showers” evoke happiness and hopefulness, but they are also required for sight and color. The entire third part of the poem, which is where light and sight imagery are most robust, remains nearly unchanged from the 1833 version.23

Immediately after the Lady expresses her unhappiness at seeing only shadows in her mirror, “the sun came dazzling thro’ the leaves,/ and flamed upon the brazen greaves/ of bold Sir Lancelot” (1833:75-77; 1842:75-77). Lancelot has a kaleidoscopic effect on the world. He is full of the bold color that is missing from Shalott. He is red, yellow, silver, blue, purple, and coal-black, but he is also full of light (1833 & 1842: 78, 80, 89, 91, 103). He dazzles, sparkles, glitters, and shines (1833 & 1842: 75, 80, 82, 92). He is “studded with sunlit, phallic imagery” (Chadwick 23). Tennyson’s poem describes the devastating effect a visually spectacular person can have on a world and, as Isobel

23 It is interesting that Tennyson “mirrors” his own writing by reproducing the poem both in revised parts and in parts which remain nearly unchanged! Isobel Armstrong has argued that “repetition, or repetition with variation… is characteristic of mythic writing” and is one of the techniques Tennyson employs to engage in myth production (“Mythography” 56).
Armstrong argues, his entrance brings the shock of “radically changed perception” (Victorian Poetry 85). Armstrong goes on to argue that “a correlative of these physical shocks [of Lancelot’s appearance, the breaking of the mirror, the destruction of the web, and the Lady’s death] are the gaps and disjunctions of the narrative which have the same effect of creating discontinuity and unsettling interpretation…” (Victorian Poetry 85). I would argue that these gaps and disjunctions in the narrative are the very devices which illustrates the importance of the individual’s interpretation. The imagery used to describe him, and which is reflected in the mirror, relies on the movement of light in order to jar the poem from its placid plodding trajectory into a more active and visually interesting experience. While one might expect the descriptions in the story to focus on the fair maiden, Tennyson, in his revision, removes any description of her. Instead the poem’s narrative hinges on the spectacle of the male hero, Lancelot. He is likened to a “bearded meteor, trailing light” and is described using an array of visual terms which denote the reflection of light rays (1833:98; 1842:98). For example, a sparkle is the flash of light that is produced by an object that refracts light quickly. Lancelot is full of light imagery as his shield sparkles, his bridle glitters, his baldric blazons, his saddle shines, his brow glows, and his helmet and helmet feather burn “like one burning flame together” as he “flash’[s] into the crystal mirror” (1833 & 1842:80, 82, 87, 92,100, 94, 106). In addition to the light that reflects off of his personal accoutrements, Lancelot’s entire being exists in multiple reflections. As has often been noted, Lancelot can be read as reflecting on both the river and the mirror in the lines “from the bank and from the river/ he flashed
into the crystal mirror” (1833:105-106; 1842:105-106). His image is multiplied, inverted, and distorted in the multiple reflections. This play of movement and light is characteristic of a fluid understanding of sight, where visual impressions are connected to the eye’s interpretation of light and movement rather than the physical object being viewed.

The dazzling light of Lancelot inspires the Lady to abandon her weaving. After Lancelot flashes through her mirror:

She left the web, she left the loom,

She made three paces thro’ the room,

She saw the water lily bloom,

She saw the helmet and the plume,

She looked down to Camelot. (1833:109-113; 1842:109-113)

This is her first movement away from the loom in the poem. The repetition of “she left” emphasizes her forsaking of the compulsory weaving with which she has been reproducing her interpretation of the outside world. This repetition is mirrored in “she saw” which shows that leaving her mirror does not eliminate her active sight, instead it exposes her to the physical world of Camelot without the displaced virtual image of the mirror. The caesura which is created in the middle of the stanza by the three consecutive stressed syllables in “She look’d down to Camelot” creates an important pause in the poem. This is the moment the trajectory of the Lady’s life changes. This is the moment that the production of her interpretation is abandoned. In a Kantian move, this at once

24 For readings of the multiple reflections of Lancelot see Joseph “Echo and Mirror” 408-409, Isobel Armstrong Victorian Poetry 85, and Martin 55.
creates her individuality and destroys it. It also undoes her productive rendering of the
world, as “out flew the web and floated wide” (1833:114; 1842:114). However, the curse
does not eliminate the proliferations of vision. Instead, when the “mirror crack’d from
side to side” even more possibilities for vision exist (1842:115).\textsuperscript{25} A cracked mirror does
not stop reflecting, but only reflects more images in slightly different aspects. Her active
and interpretive vision does not stop when the mirror breaks; it stops when she abandons
her tower.

In the 1842 version of the poem, the first description of the Lady is related after
she has left the island and is floating in her boat toward Camelot. In the boat, she is
“Lying, robed in snowy white/ That loosely flew to left and right--/ The leaves upon her
falling light” (1842:136-38). Once again, this is not a description of her person, but only
of her clothing. She still has no personal description, but now she has also abandoned her
ability to interpret and produce. The Lady is also not described as full of the vibrant
color that the other people in the poem are. Instead, she is snowy white, the absence of
color. Tennyson is careful to use light imagery to describe her only in this last piece of
the poem, where she is already cursed. In the original poem, her belt is “clasped with one
blinding diamond bright” (1833:130). Her appearance is at once magnificently lit and
blinding. Rather than enabling sight, the light reflecting off of the Lady has the power to
nullify sight. Tennyson removes this from his final version of the poem, but her body is
still a “gleaming shape floating by” as she enters Camelot (1842:156). The Lady’s body
is a luminary object after she has abandoned the production of the web.

\textsuperscript{25} The only difference in the 1833 version of the poem is the spelling of the word
cracked. The line reads “the mirror cracked from side to side” (1833:115).
Interestingly, as she becomes a luminary object, Camelot’s light lessens. Chadwick argues that “once outside those walls, the Lady, unlike Plato’s freed prisoner (and this is the key to the differences between them), finds a world just as gray as the one she has left” (27). While the color and visual splendor of Camelot may have been an illusion of the mirror or of the Lady’s romanticized perception, it is equally possible that the Lady has brought the grayness of Shalott with her as she descends upon Camelot. After the curse is invoked, the stormy east-winds begin to blow and the “pale-yellow woods [begin] waning” (1833:119; 1842:119). Waning is generally a term used to describe the moon when it is reflecting less of the sun’s light than usual; it appears smaller when it is in the waning portion of its cycle. The waning of the pale yellow woods describe a restriction of light into Camelot. While the Lady’s tower has experienced light restriction throughout the poem, this is the first time in its description that Camelot experiences bland colors, as in the “pale-yellow wood,” and a restriction of light (1833:119; 1842:119). Pale yellow is not the bright and brazen color that Lancelot enjoys, nor is it the oppressive gray that surrounds the Lady. Pale yellow is the color of illness. It is this sallowness which threatens to overtake Camelot. The Lady of Shalott’s curse is one that threatens to demolish the bright and dazzling physical world of Camelot.

As she floats down the river, “with a glassy countenance/ did she look to Camelot” (1842:130-131).26 In a poem that makes the mirror a central object in the narrative, the use of the word “glassy” to describe the Lady’s countenance is important. She abandons the mirror as a way of accessing the external world, she instead looks

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26 In the 1833 version this reads, “Mute, with a glassy countenance--/She looked down to Camelot” (1833:139-140).
directly at that world. But, knowledge of the world renders her as the mirror or the lens. Matthew Rowlinson argues that the glassy countenance with which she looks at Camelot “suggests that for the Lady a purely specular relation with the object has become impossible” and that the similarities between her blanched face and the pale landscape indicate that her “self has somehow been lost” (81). However, instead of losing herself to the specular, her glassy countenance suggests that she has become the optical device from which she turned. As we have seen in the popular science texts from the period, glass lenses were often used in optical amusements and instruments because their translucency made it possible to see through them, and they could be shaped in ways that would distort, magnify, or displace images. When she steps in front of the mirror, she should see Camelot, and the people of Camelot should be able to see her. However, the narrator still cannot describe her person because, when she stands in front of the mirror, she is still invisible. She becomes a translucent lens through which light can “gleam” and upon which Camelot can reflect.

The light imagery in the poem again recalls Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” In the poem, the bright play of light rays is the catalyst for the Lady’s movement away from her loom and to the window. According to Plato, when the man in the cave is “liberated and compelled suddenly to turn his neck round and go up and look at the light, he will suffer sharp pains” (209). In Plato’s allegory, the man is attracted to the light, but is injured by the enlightenment that light affords. In the poem, Tennyson describes the Lady’s looking at the world directly as a gaining of knowledge which is too overwhelming to survive. When she is still in Shalott, the “silent isle imbowers [sic]” her
(1833:17; 1842:17). The use of the word embowers is indicative of the protection that the island affords the Lady. She is trapped on the island, but she is protected from something while she is on it. This indicates that the “grey” prison-like walls which surround her, the height of the tower, and the moat-like water around her island are all measures of protection. However, from what she is being protected is never clear. The curse has the ability to transcend the moat, so the protection is not against the curse. Part four of the poem, after the curse, gives a hint as to the nature of the danger. While she is on the island, her vision is constantly active. As she floats toward Camelot, she looks like “some bold seër in a trance,/ Seeing all his own mischance” (1842:128-29). Now, she is in a trance. A trance is the opposite of active vision. When in a trance, a person is receiving stimuli but not responsive to it. Rather than being productive, the entranced person is ultimately only receptive. The Lady’s trance is induced by the way that she looks at the world. She has seen too much and, just like the seer who sees his own demise, the knowledge of what she has seen is too overwhelming for her. She is like the man in Plato’s allegory, injured by the light she has seen and overcome by her enlightenment.

The light imagery also hints at the implications of the curse for Camelot. As she floats down the river, the people of Camelot come to see her, and they read her name.

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27 In the 1833 version this quote is the same except that “seeing” is changed to “beholding” (1833:138).
28 The OED lists two contemporaneous uses of the word trance which help to contextualize its use in this poem. The first is in Byron’s “Sardanapalus” where a trance is “nature’s last resort against the tyranny of pain.” The other is in R. Dunglison’s *Medical Lexicon*, where the complete suspension of mental faculties is described as a trance.
This is their first direct experience with her in the poem. In both versions of the poem, this first direct experience is accompanied by fear. As her body enters the town, the “Knight and burgher, lord and dame… crossed themselves, their stars they blest” (1833:168, 172). In the revised poem, she has a stifling effect on Camelot as “in the lighted palace near/ Died the sound of royal cheer;/ And they crossed themselves for fear,/ all the knights at Camelot” (1842:165-68). People in the town of Camelot may be responding to the pain of enlightenment, just as the Lady experiences when she looks directly at Camelot and as Plato’s man experiences when he leaves the cave. It is also possible that the Lady’s interpretation of the world threatens to overtake Camelot. Both versions of the poem indicate that she threatens to steal sight from the town. After she becomes cursed, in the first poem she dons a belt which is “clasped with one blinding diamond bright” and in the second she becomes “a gleaming shape” (1833:130; 1842:156). In the first description, she is only reflecting light which is so strong that it is damaging to the sight of those who look at it. In the second, a revised version which shows control over the imagery, she becomes the luminous shape. Instead of reflecting light, she is the source of the light and, as the woods of Camelot are “waning,” she restricts the other light that can enter Camelot. The Lady becomes the luminary object that Lancelot was upon his entrance. She is empowered by her ability to usurp, reflect, or reduce the light entering Camelot. Perhaps the fear of the curse for the town is the imposing of the Lady’s vision, her interpretation of the world, upon the world of

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29 Notice, she is still described as a shape rather than a woman or person. Throughout the poem, she lacks individuality and humanity.
Camelot. If she is the only light that exists, then all vision must conform to the light
which she makes available.

This analysis is especially fitting in the earlier version of the poem. In this poem,
when the people of Camelot see the Lady, “there lay a parchment on her breast” that
reads

The web was woven curiously
The charm is broken utterly,
Draw near and fear not—this is I,

The Lady of Shalott. (1833: 177-180)

This parchment gives the Lady the final words in the poem. She has the power to tell her
story of the curse and the spell, and she commands the people to “fear not.” The Lady,
not the bold seer who knows more than others, can interpret what she experiences and
impose her vision on the world. This ending also participates in a material version of
sight. When they see her, they must read her name on the boat to know who she is. This
parchment further explains that she is the Lady of Shalott. Here, the “truth” of the Lady,
who she is, is quite literally physically connected to her. She is the Lady of Shalott; her
identification is pinned to her clothing. This recalls earlier ideas of sight, such as the
eidola, where color perception was physically connected to the object being seen rather
than to the viewer. In this last stanza, Tennyson suggests that there is some underlying
truth in the world which cannot be separated from it through perception.

The revised poem changes this last stanza. Instead of the Lady having the last
word in the poem, Lancelot does. While the other Knights cross themselves in fear,
Lancelot mused a little space;

He said, “She has a lovely face;

God in his mercy lend her grace,

The Lady of Shalott. (1842: 169-172)

This ending limits the Lady’s power and models active interpretation for the reader. When she leaves her loom, she does so to look directly down to Camelot. In this one look, she objectifies Lancelot as she “saw the helmet and the plume” (1833:112-113; 1842:112-113). In the 1970s Laura Mulvey argued that narrative cinema works to objectify women by framing women on the screen as erotic parts of a whole. This practice of objectification existed long before narrative cinema, however. Myths of looking include Gorgon, Orpheus and Eurydice, Cupid and Psyche, and Narcissus (Isobel Armstrong, “Mythography” 57). The Lady is inspired to leave her loom by narrative “close-ups” on Lancelot and the light which reflects off of him. All the parts of him that are described relate to his knighthood, simultaneously a symbol of class and masculinity. His shield sparkles, his gemmy bridle glitters, his armour rings, and he rides a war-horse (1833 & 1842:79, 82, 89, 101). When she finally looks directly at Camelot, she “[sees] the helmet and the plume” which leads to her demise (1833:112; 1842; 112). These are pieces of Lancelot which allow the Lady of Shalott to objectify him. This objectification is complete because even after the Lady leaves her loom, she remains invisible to the people of Camelot. He cannot gaze back at the Lady. Yet, as David Martin points out, “whether she is aware of it or not… the Lady can see only her own image of Lancelot”

30 This change of the last stanza of the poem may also have been motivated, as is possible with many of his revisions, by his response to the criticism the original received.
and she is therefore still trapped in images of her own making (255). This final stanza in the revised poem rectifies this objectification of a single perspective. Lancelot is able to gaze directly at the Lady and comment about her appearance. Rather than commenting on her person, or even her entirety, he also sees her as a part of a whole as he says, “she has a lovely face” (1842:169). He has the ability to compartmentalize pieces of the Lady and to judge her by her appearance, thereby objectifying her. Lancelot becomes the interpreting voice for Camelot, which offers an alternative perspective to the reader.

While it seems that the ending of the earlier version of the poem gives the lady more control, a closer examination of the narrator’s role throughout the poem suggests that he has ultimate control over the story. In the 1832 version of the poem, the narrator has the ability to penetrate the protective tower in which the Lady weaves. He is voyeuristic as he can describe her when she is clearly unaware of the narrator’s presence. When she is in her tower, “a pearlgarland winds her head” and she “leaneth on a velvet bed,/ Fully royally appareled” (1832:33-35). When she is leaving her tower to float to Camelot, “a cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight./ All raimented in snowy white” (1832:127-28). In this version of the poem, it is clear that the narrator can see the Lady, even when she is in her chamber. While he can see inside her chamber, he chooses not to describe what she is weaving in her tapestry, and instead describes what is “actually” occurring on the road to Camelot or describes how the scene looks in the mirror. For example, we know that:

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,

An abbott on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,

Or longhaired page, in crimson clad,

Goes by to towered Camelot. (1832:55-59; 1842:55-59)

This is just one example of the narrator’s descriptions of the road to Camelot. He can see the mirror, as he describes that “thro’ the mirror blue,/ the knights come riding, two and two,” and he knows that Lancelot “flash[es] into the crystal mirror” (1832:60-61, 106; 1842:60-61, 106). Because he can so clearly see the Lady and her mirror, his failure to describe her weaving can be read as his disregard for her interpretation. In this version, the narrator has ultimate control over the story. The Lady only exists as a mythical figure who is a part of the tale the narrator is relating. Therefore, her voice at the end of the poem belongs to the narrator. Hers is not a voice, it is a note that the narrator is allowing to enter into the telling of the story.

However, it is possible that this reading gives the narrator too much interpretive control over the narrative. While it is unclear if the narrator is describing the actual world, it is clear that the narrator can see the images in the mirror. His descriptions of the scenery, such as “on either side of the mirror lie/ long fields of barley and of rye” and “thro’ the mirror… the knights come riding, two and two,” can also be read as his own interpretation of the images seen in the mirror (1832 & 1842:4, 60-61). The narrator still has the ability to penetrate the Lady’s tower, but he may not have the ability to see Camelot without the aid of the mirror. These descriptions are once again inverted and multiplied, suggesting that the narrator does not possess ultimate control over the narrative, but rather the mirror does.
In the 1842 version of the story, the Lady is not described until she leaves the tower. This makes the relationship between the narrator and the Lady more ambiguous. While one might assume that the narrator still has the ability to penetrate her space, as the descriptions of the “flashes” in the mirror remain, his neglect to describe the Lady makes this ability doubtful. It is still possible that the narrator has the ability to see the Lady and her web, but chooses not to describe either one of them, thereby rendering her visually insignificant and rendering her tapestry, and by extension her interpretation, inconsequential. Herbert Tucker describes the narrator in the 1842 poem as an “aloof neutral scribe of outward events” whose narrative “breaks down at the moment when description yields to directly quoted speech” (100). The narrative breaks at the end of each part, when another character’s voice enters the poem, supports this reading. The narrator breaks from the story whenever another voice enters the poem, challenging his narrative authority. However, an alternative reading is also possible. The Lady may be as protected from the narrator’s penetrating glance as she is from the people of Camelot and from Lancelot as long as she remains embowered on her “silent isle.” The narrator hints that this may be the case. When he asks, “who hath seen her wave her hand?/ Or at the casement seen her stand?/ Or is she know in all the land…” (1842:25-27). His answer is, “Only reapers, reaping early” (1842:28). The limiting adverb, “only” is very important in this answer, as it tells the reader that even the narrator has not seen the Lady. He has only heard of her from the reaper who “whispers, “’Tis the fairy / Lady of Shalott” (1832:35-36). While he knows what she is doing in her tower, his knowledge could be hearsay, conjecture, or myth that is whispered between the people of Camelot.
In this reading, the narrator is able to see the displaced virtual image the mirror is providing, just as the Lady sees, but this mirror does not allow him to see the Lady. The Lady is always a clear vessel, the lens or the glass that she presumably becomes after assuming the curse, that can be filled with meaning by the narrator’s assumptions about her.

Whether or not the narrator can access the images in the mirror, he does not describe what is being seen in the mirror, which also allows for a proliferation in the valid visions possible in the poem. The Lady is never described as seeing herself in the mirror, but this does not mean that she is unable to do so. Yet, the narrator never describes her as seeing herself, either because he cannot see her image in the mirror, or because he deems her person insignificant. Furthermore, Christopher Ricks has pointed out that the mirror is not an unusual piece of equipment for a weaver to use (357). Since the weaver works on the back of their product, the mirror is used to reflect the front of the fabric to her. This further complicates the imagery, as the Lady’s interpretation may be what is being reflected to her in a circuitous cycle of interpretation, production, and re-interpretation. This reading makes the light and mirror imagery more powerful as it allows for a proliferation in the possibilities for valid vision of the diagetic world. Even in the simplest understanding of a mirror, vision of a physical reality is multiplied and distorted through duplication and inversion. Here the mirror displaces images, inverts them, and reflects them several times, each viewer seeing an image which only exists for his/her perception. The mirror may be reflecting the web the Lady weaves, the Lady herself, the road to Camelot, any combination of two, or perhaps all three! The mirror
itself may contain multiple vignettes, and, just as when a person moves closer to a mirror, the images that are reflected change as the narrator changes position, from 1833 to 1842. In this analysis, the Lady’s interpretation of Camelot is no less important than the narrator’s, it is only less articulated. Whether or not the narrator has the ability to see the Lady, his failure to describe her renders her invisible. This invisibility is a constraint, as it denies her subjectivity. However, it also multiplies the possibilities of sight. Each reader, reaper, narrator, and knight has the ability to envision the Lady in his/her own personal way as long as she remains invisible. The proliferation of valid visions of the Lady is demonstrated by the proliferations of paintings and dramatic photographs which depict her. All of these artistic visions are valid. The imagery of light rays and the mirror allow for individual perception to dominate the narrative.

Just as the poem models varying interpretations of Camelot and the Lady’s web, so too do creative works depicting it and the critical literature written about it. Walter Crane’s *Willows Whiten, Aspens Quiver* is one of the few images which depicts the landscape rather than the Lady herself (fig. 2.1, 1858-59). Sidney Harold Meteyard’s “I am half sick of shadows,” said the Lady of Shalott
depicts a very dark haired woman in a striking blue dress with her hair thrown back in exasperation (fig. 2.2, 1913). Arthur Hughes _The Lady of Shalott_ depicts a fair girl with light brown hair floating in a boat as horrified villagers stand on the riverbanks (fig. 2.3, 1873). Even individual artists could not maintain one coherent view of the Lady. John
William Waterhouse’s *The Lady of Shalott* depicts a red-haired woman wearing a white dress sitting in her boat (fig. 2.4, 1888), while the Lady in his *The Lady of Shalott Looking at Lancelot* is dark-haired woman in a white dress tangled in her threads (fig. 2.5, 1894), and the heroine in his “I am half-sick of shadows,” Said the Lady of Shalott depicts the Lady as a dark haired girl in a red dress sitting in front of her loom (fig. 2.6 1915). The ambiguities present in the poem with regards to the description of the Lady allow all of these artistic renditions. The narrative provides only the basic outline of a story that J.W. Croker derided in his 1833 review of the poem when he summed it up as “The lady stepped to the window to look at a stranger, and forgot for an instant her web:—the curse fell on her, and she died” (71). What Croker fails to appreciate, but
which these illustrations show, is that this story encourages multiple re-renderings of itself.

Critical attention has varied greatly in its attentions as well. Isobel Armstrong has argued that the revisions to the poem show Tennyson’s political motivation as he shows an increasing concern with “labour, appropriation and power” (77). Daniel Albright has argued that the poem illustrates Tennyson’s two opposing muses, one who delights in “the definite shapes of the sensible world,” and the other who is a “shivery, celestial faculty that creates images beyond the range of our usual eyesight” (31). Gerhard Joseph has even read the poem as a “parable of recent literary history charting the movement from a New Critical analysis of authored ‘works’ to a post-structuralist reading of unauthored texts” (“Victorian Weaving” 30). These and other critical works argue that the poem can tell us something about Tennyson, that the differences between the two versions can tell us something

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6
John William Waterhouse, “I am half-sick of shadows,” said the Lady of Shalott, 1915. Oil on canvas.
about the political climate, or that the poem can reveal something about our own scholarly trends. As the mirror breaks in the poem, we can fill the voids with our own ideas of what the story should contain, what the allegory should mean, and what the mythical world should look like. The mirror, the narrator, the Lady, the reaper, and Lancelot have all modeled what an active interpretation should be and clearly we are anxious to follow.
Chapter 3: Size Matters: Alice’s Body and Her Curious Visual Experience

“I don’t think they can hear me,” she went on, as she put her head closer down, “and I’m nearly sure they ca’nt see me. I feel somehow as if I was getting invisible—”

Carroll *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* 128

But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known through all the land,

The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,

*Down to tower’d Camelot;*

*(Tennyson “The Lady of Shalott” 24-32)*

The juxtaposition between the Lady of Shalott’s presence and absence haunts the poem. The people of Camelot know that she is in her tower, but they cannot see her. The reaper listens and “whispers ‘Tis the fairy Lady of Shalott” (36), acknowledging her
presence. Yet, while her presence is acknowledged, she remains visibly and physically absent from the society of Camelot. Her voice, an invisible auditory marker, indicates to the society that she is there while her tower holds her away from the people of the town. In *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice experiences a similar problem. While throughout the book she will fluctuate between being visible and invisible, and being able to see or not to see others, her first step into the looking glass house makes her an invisible, yet physically present force.

The Alice books explore three different kinds of invisibility. Sometimes things are physically present but they are hidden from sight. This is the type of invisibility, perhaps best termed obscurity, that the Lady suffers in “The Lady of Shalott.” At other times, things are subvisible, or physically present but too small to be seen. Still another kind of invisibility is linguistic invisibility, when people or things are physically present but unable to be named. Yet, being invisible does not mean that people, characters, and things cease to exist. Instead, Alice finds that being invisible in Wonderland and the Looking Glass World can work to her benefit, although it has the potential to destroy her individual subjectivity.

The distinction between the subvisible and the invisible was the subject of debate in scientific communities after the perfection of the microscope. Joseph Jackson Lister had invented a perfected microscope in the 1820s and he presented it to the Royal Society in 1830. Throughout the 1830s microorganisms which could only be seen through the use of a microscope, were considered crucial to most of the functions of the natural world, from yeast rising to putrefaction. Yet, Daniel Tiffany notes that the “images
supplied by the microscope became the subject of a fierce philosophical debate” where some argued that the “phenomena glimpsed through the lens [were] merely subvisible (not visible to the naked eye),” but others regarded those phenomena “as invisible, as entities whose visual character is an effect of the lens, or indeed as entities which have no verifiable material existence” (185). The second position implies that subvisible organisms could simply be considered tricks of the microscopic gaze. In 1839 the German scientists Hermann von Helmholtz and Justus von Liebig claimed that the microorganisms were not as powerful as they had been credited, supporting the idea that those seen through the microscope had been conjured up by the scope itself.

This scientific aside is important as the first of the Alice books was published in 1865 after this debate had been decided and the language of the “microorganism” had entered the scientific world and the minds of society at large. In 1857 Louis Pasteur conducted another series of experiments which proved that microorganisms were indeed as necessary to life, death, and disease as had once been thought. With these experiments, that which was subvisible was finally regarded as physical. The visual logic of subvisibility dictates that those objects in the world which are very small, so small that they are not visible to the naked eye, are still present and are necessary for everyday life.

In the novels, Alice herself fluctuates between subvisibility, invisibility, and conspicuousness offering an array of interpretive possibilities. Critics have often discussed Alice in terms of her coming of age, her sexual nature, her class status, her educational background and her relationship to “nonsense.” For example, in “Alice and

31 The information about the scientific developments of the microscope in these two paragraphs comes chiefly from Henry Smith Williams’ A History of Science vol. IV.
Wonderland,” Nina Auerbach claims that Alice learns about her own identity, uncharacteristic of heroines in Victorian Novels who instead act as catalysts for heroes. William Empson argues that Alice’s changing body represents her pubescence in his essay *Some Versions of the Pastoral*. John Batchelor’s essay “Dodgson, Carroll, and the Emancipation of Alice” contends that Alice’s social prominence is evident when the Dodo assumes she will give the prizes for the caucus race. In “From Garden to Gardener” Joanna Tapp Pierce argues that Alice’s education consists of learning how the world works (752). Linda M. Shires explores the chasm between fantasy and reality when parody and nonsense are deployed in the *Alice* texts in her essay “Fantasy, Nonsense, Parody, and the Status of the Real.” However, critics often overlook the fact that Alice’s visual experience, and the ways that others visually perceive Alice, enable all of these readings. While the first of the Alice books, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, is not overtly about visual experience, the second book’s title, *Through the Looking Glass*, draws attention to the visual nature of the dream worlds. This second book is dominated by interesting visual tricks while the first is riddled with riddles. However, after reading *Through the Looking Glass*, one can reexamine *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to find that it too utilizes a visual logic in order to structure its world. The concept of the subvisible and invisible offers further proliferations of valid visual interpretations of the external world. The logic of vision also functions in both as a trope for the difficult and often contradictory role for women in Victorian culture. The text illustrates the fear that a subvisible female body can surreptitiously influence society while offering the fantasy that the good Victorian reader will be able to see the difference.
between the non-threatening domestic woman and the monstrous femme fatale. Alice prefers to be powerful and finds that remaining hidden can help her become so. However, remaining invisible also has the potential to separate her from her individual subjectivity, symbolized by the removal of her name, a linguistic invisibility.

Alice as Body, Image, Dust

It may seem strange to use Alice as an entry into the Victorian image of womanhood, but this reading is one that has long been in use by other theorists and one that is particularly justified here. Alice bears many resemblances to the Lady of Shalott, another image of Victorian womanhood, so it is useful to discuss the two works in relation to the same themes. The Lady’s invisibility while present, linguistic invisibility, relationship to mirrors, and compulsory interpreting of the outside world are all present in the Alice texts. James R. Kincaid’s arguments that the Victorian concept of childhood is one of an “adult-in-training” and that Alice “more or less is grown-up… probably was born grown up” seem to be supported by these similarities (278, 288). Women’s education during the era further supports the claim that the Victorian girl was a woman-in-training. Joanna Tapp Pierce and Laura Mooneyham White both point to the relationship between the Alice books and John Ruskin’s “Of Queen’s Gardens,” a lecture he gave regarding women’s education. Ruskin’s lecture suggests that with proper cultivation young girls can grow to be proper English heroines, a process which can greatly benefit their country. Pierce argues that both Ruskin’s text and the Alice books teach girls that their power should be contained within a garden of domesticity, and they therefore should remain essentially socially powerless. Conversely, White argues that
Carroll is mocking the Ruskinian idea of multiple queens and domestic queenliness. Although White and Pierce both compare Ruskin and Carroll, they argue two contradictory points. These essays illustrate that Carroll’s text is commonly interpreted as a lesson in women’s education and Ruskin’s argument reinforces the idea of proper womanly cultivation in young girls. Additionally, womanhood and childhood were often coupled together in Victorian ideology. Nina Auerbach argues that Alice embodies “two Victorian domestic myths: Wordsworth’s ‘seer blessed,’ the child fresh from the Imperial Palace and still washed by his continuing contact with ‘that immortal sea,’ and the pure woman Alice will become, preserving an oasis for God and order in a dim and tangled world” (31-32). These two myths ascribe the same virtues to the infant child and the grown woman. Both are vessels for Godly preservation. In this construction, the differences between them are purely corporeal; the woman and the child are different in the number of years their bodily oases have existed on the earth.

Yet this bodily change is amorphous. In Patmore Coventry’s *Angel in the House*, a poem dedicated to the idealization and praise of a the perfect domestic woman, the narrator describes the grown woman in relation to her age. He says that “the years, so far from doing her wrong, anointed her with gracious balm, and made her brows more and more young with wreaths of amaranth and palm” (Canto I.92-95). The adult woman is “more and more” young looking, and therefore more a child than a youth. The narrator goes on to say that she is “marr’d less than man by mortal fall, her disposition is devout, her countenance angelical” (Canto IV.10-12). Therefore, as with the Wordsworthian child, the perfect woman is also closer to God and the angels than man is. The perfect
Victorian woman, then, is one who is innocent and free of affect. The perfect Victorian woman is the Victorian child. If the perfect woman’s brow does not age, and her soul and demeanor remain unmarred by the sinister public world, bodily age must be measured by some other means. The woman, then, is a woman because she is, quite literally, grown up!

Alice does experience quite a bit of growing taller in Wonderland. The traditional argument is that Alice’s constantly fluctuating size illustrates anxieties of growing older and losing youth (Empson 266). Early in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland Carroll gives readers a hint that visual metaphors will give clues as to identity. When the mouse is telling his long tale, the font is actually shaped like a mouse’s tail (28), a trick of typeface that Carroll will repeat in the incident with the Gnat in Through the Looking Glass. The text visually looks like the joke that it represents. The font size in the tail tale also gets much smaller near the end, but it begins in the regular font size of the rest of the text. The font represents a mouse’s tail and cues the reader to interpret visual imprints as projections of character. Shires points out that the last word of the tail, death, is the most notable because it is the smallest word in the tale and that “Carroll foregrounds miniaturization as technique, and the technique holds that a reduction in scale does not reduce the meaning of the content” (277). The smallness of the word “death” makes it the most important. Alice has a problem with her body growing larger and smaller, much as these font sizes do, which may represent her growing into womanhood or it may be a metaphoric implication of her increasing power. Alice may be physically enacting the

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32 Empson also argues that Alice’s changing body and her emergence from the salt water ocean of her tears is a reference to evolution.
gender ideologies of the microscopic era. Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lillies* characterizes a separate spheres ideology which dictates that women remain absent from the public “sphere.” Yet, Ruskin also argues that any injustice or suffering in the world is the fault of woman for not “hindering” the events that produce them (*Selected Writings* 158, 171). Therefore, women are placed in an impossible position. At once they must be absent from the public world, yet they must be ever present to mitigate the disasters that might befall it. In this way, women were very much like the dust that plagued the Victorian era, and Victorian literature. Kate Flint shows that in literature and in life dust was regarded as both a blessing and a curse. It was credited with producing beauty, as in the theory of “sky matter” which John Tyndall thought was blue dust that made the sky appear blue, and prosperity as in the dust heaps which make the Boffins in *Our Mutual Friend* so rich. Yet dust was also thought to be a sign of decay and harmful to one’s health. While dust was presumed to be always present, each particle is so small that it required a microscope to see, and in aggregate dust could still elude the naked eye due to changes in lighting (40-59). This absence/presence is one that Alice can enact through her growing and shrinking. She is very much like the dust that Flint discusses. She is always around, yet she is entreated to stay quiet and out of the way much of the time. She must learn to become like the last word, death, in the mouse’s tale. To be a proper Ruskinian “Queen,” Alice must be visibly absent from the public world, but she also must be physically present. She must enter the microscope and find power in becoming very small and outwardly insignificant. In short, the upper class Victorian Alice must learn to become dust.
Alice’s first accidental growth reveals that she understands that the importance of remaining small is tied to class-consciousness. Immediately after Alice grows large for the first time in Wonderland, she wonders if she “has changed overnight” (17). She asks herself: “‘Who in the world am I?’” (18). This reveals that she is not worried that her physical body has changed, but rather is afraid that her identity has changed with her body becoming so physically large. Alice worries that she “must be Mabel after all,” a little girl she knows who is the same age as herself, who “knows such a very little” (18-19). The prospect of being Mabel is disturbing to her because, if she is Mabel, she will have to live in “that poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with, and oh, ever so many lessons to learn” (19). The fear of being Mabel is accompanied by a disdain for her possessions and knowledge. The smaller house and the lack of toys would indicate that Mabel’s family is less wealthy than Alice’s family. Her ignorance and need for many lessons may indicate, however, that Mabel is also of a lower class than Alice. Alice has had good schooling and governesses, or at the very least she feels that she has, whereas Mabel has not had the benefit of education and such lessons as the tale of the Little Busy Bee. The poor schooling can also be an indication of poor interpretive skills, which is another marker of lower classes in a society where the discerning eye is an indication of upper class education. Kincaid notes that, while “the cult of femininity we are told the Victorians honored” is the “vision of a static woman with no thought of direction or needs of her own,” Alice resists this by having a goal throughout both novels (289). When examining Ruskin’s text it becomes apparent that the Victorian woman was not inert; she was still required to be educated, to practice her own skills of interpretation,
and to prevent calamities from happening in the public world. Indeed, Ruskin’s “Of Queen’s Gardens” calls for a thorough education of girls, not for the same purposes as the education of boys, but to make them able “to feel and to judge” (*Selected Writings* 161). Judgment requires that girls, that is upper class girls who are learning to become upper class women, learn to interpret their world correctly. He even compares women to the light which allows people to see colors clearly, equating women with the interpretive power of sight. However, in order to be able to use this active and interpretive sight, the upper class woman must remain like dust, subvisible to others.

Lower class women were highly visible; the Contagious Diseases Act is evidence of this. The Act determined that the spread of venereal diseases could be reduced by examining the bodies of prostitutes. Essentially, the women’s bodies were indicted as the vessels through which diseases were spread. The man who must have given the prostitute the disease initially, as she surely was not born with it, was neither penalized nor examined. These women were highly visible as prostitutes, and they were required to remain visible by this act which mandated pelvic exams of any woman suspected of being a prostitute. Lower class women were often accused of prostitution and required to undergo the same examination, even against their wills (Walkowitz 78-89, 137-47). The implication was that by looking at a woman’s genitals, a physician could determine if they were diseased. In this system, lower class women were equated with prostitutes whose bodies were open to scrutiny. When Alice grows larger, she fears a similar public scrutiny which would threaten her class position. Of course Alice is not necessarily afraid of an involuntary pelvic exam, nor is she afraid that others will mistake her for a
prostitute. Instead, Alice fears changing identity, and therefore trading a position of class and wealth with Mabel, directly after her body becomes large for the first time. Although there is no indication that Mabel is older or larger, Alice equates becoming larger with a lower class status. She fears this change because her body, when she is abnormally tall, becomes highly visible and conspicuous; the more conspicuous the body, the more this body is open to interpretation from outside sources. Her large body indicates her fear not only of becoming older, but also of becoming a conspicuous woman, which would then require the forfeiture of her upper class status.

Alice’s rapidly growing and shrinking body is a representation of the fluctuation between visibility and subvisibility, and the different powers which are inherent in each. Alice is most conspicuous, as any nine-foot tall seven-year-old girl would be, when she is large. When she is small she observes others without being observed. She is present, but non-threatening, exactly what a Victorian woman should be. While the mirror in *Through the Looking Glass* will help to preserve Alice from the prying looks of the world, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* her ever-fluctuating body size, to the extent that she can regulate it, helps Alice control who looks at her and how they use their glances. Arguably, after her first instances of growing and shrinking, Alice has control over her body’s size. In the White Rabbit’s house she decides to drink from a little bottle, saying: “I know *something* interesting is sure to happen… whenever I eat or drink anything: I’ll just see what this bottle does. I do hope it’ll make me grow large again” (32). This comment shows that Alice is aware that eating items changes her body and, while she does not know what will make her body larger or smaller, she understands
causality. In this incident she is willing to risk growing even smaller for the possibility of becoming larger again. However, after she meets with the caterpillar, she finds two pieces of mushroom, one which can make her larger, and another which can make her smaller. She carries them with her and gains control over exactly how large or small her body is. Alice is able to make herself her “normal” height, but immediately afterwards sees a little house. She decides that “it’ll never do to come upon them this size” because it would “frighten them out of their wits” so she eats enough mushroom to once again become only nine inches tall (49). She finds that a small stature works in her favor. Although she has been striving to grow “normal,” just as she finally attains this goal she begins to understand that being miniature is optimal. The two footmen who meet in front of the house make Alice laugh, and she hides in the wood “for fear of their hearing her” (50). Alice is able to hide because she is small and inconspicuous. Alice realizes the value of being small, she is not frightening to others so she can hide, and she uses the mushroom to make her so. Her smallness represents subvisibility, a condition where objects are invisible to the eye and can therefore cause great change without being noticed except in their effects.

Subvisibility, and other types of invisibility, is the condition of being physically present but visibly absent. Throughout the novels there are moments when Alice is threatened with becoming a mere image which would render her physically absent but visibly present, the inverse of subvisible. As an image, Alice would be open to scrutiny from outside forces, much like the lower-class prostitutes Walkowitz discusses, and she would be separated from her own subjectivity. Her ability to analyze her world would be
jeopardized just as an image cannot dynamically interpret the external world but can be examined by others. This existence is one that Alice resists. While in “The Lady of Shalott” the Lady’s absence yet presence haunts the poem, in Wonderland and Looking Glass World Alice finds power in being physically present but visibly absent.

In the Looking Glass house, Alice can see the chess pieces that will make up a good part of the Looking Glass society but she is invisible and inaudible to them. Alice is able to influence the world of the chess pieces even though they cannot hear or see her. Alice picks up the White Queen to put her next to her crying child, a pawn, on the table. Because Alice is invisible, the White Queen cannot understand how she moved through the air so quickly. The Queen explains her movement as the by-product of a volcano, or a volcanic wind, which “blew—[her]—up” (129). The choice of words used to express Alice’s invisibility-yet-presence is interesting. A volcano is a visible force, but winds that blow are only visible in their effects. For example, a wind may be blowing, but if looking at the wind from a window one would have to deduce that the wind was blowing through the movement of trees or the noise the wind produces. The Queen’s remark simultaneously attempts to visualize the invisible force while acknowledging that some physical sensations are invisible by nature.

However, Alice’s body is not always a physically present force. From very early in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Alice wonders if her body is becoming an image. When she is falling down the rabbit hole, she wonders if she will be upside down when
she gets to the other side (11). While this could be read as a simple question of the state of the physical world on “the other side” of the globe, this could also be read as a reference to the camera obscura. Alice is thinking of her body as the projection of an image travelling through the long tunneling hole of the camera obscura. When she enters the other side, the place where the projected image appears, she will be upside down, just as the image from a camera obscura is. This reading is supported by the use of light in this chapter. Light does more than illuminate objects around her, it is instrumental in directing her sight and guiding her actions. For example, when she is falling down the rabbit hole, she first tries to “look down and make out what is coming, but it [is] too dark to see anything” so instead “she look[s] at the sides of the well” and ponders the objects which reside on the shelves (10). When she finally lands, she cannot see above her, the path she has taken to arrive at the bottom of the rabbit hole, but she can see the rabbit, so she follows him (12). A camera obscura uses a tiny hole and lens which directs a very small shaft of light in a very specific direction, therefore pin-pointing what one can actually see in the projection. Alice’s fall mimics this. She only sees what is being shown to her through the tunnel of the camera obscura. Her projected body has no choice but to follow the light, and therefore she follows the rabbit. She cannot attempt to climb back up the rabbit hole, because this is not the way light works within a camera obscura. This understanding of her body as a projection removes it from its physical presence in

33 The fact that she falls down a gaping hole could be another argument for her conversion to womanhood. The hole in “mother” earth could signify that she has fallen through a gaping vagina in order to enter into womanhood.
Wonderland. Instead of her body growing larger and smaller, her image becomes conspicuous and inconspicuous as it changes size.

Alice is further threatened with becoming an image when she is examined with the use of visual technologies. Haughton argues that Alice is “subjected to aggressive public scrutiny” in the scene where the Guard on the train looks at her “first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera glass” (Haughton xlviii, Carroll 146). Haughton is correct in pointing out that these devices exemplify a scrutinizing, and therefore penetrating, glance. The three devices, the telescope, microscope, and opera glass, represent three very different ways of looking at women, ways which accompany the metaphoric significance of the technologies. The telescope is used to look at things which are so far away, they cannot be seen without the extension of the eye. This is a specific kind of invisibility, one in which the object is always present, but never seen due to its distance from the seeing body. This distance may be the distance between the actual and dream worlds, or the distance between Alice’s class and that of the guard who is employed taking tickets. The use of a telescope implies that Alice’s is a meteoric body, too far from the guard to be seen. The telescope brings the guard closer to Alice; however the distance is still too great between them, so he uses a microscope instead. The microscope is used to examine objects which exist in the every day world, but which are so small that they cannot be seen with the naked eye as characterized by nineteenth-century germ theory. The microscope was employed to make germs, bacteria, and dust, very small particles with which one had constant contact, visible. The microscope, then, could be seen as a metaphor for the envisioning of the
“good” upper class domestic woman—one who exists in everyday life, but is subvisible to the public because she remains hidden from the world by her inconspicuous “nature.” The microscope allows the guard to access the woman optically, to penetrate her image. The opera glass is used to see performances on stage more clearly. Looking at Alice through an opera glass implies that she is performing a role. If she is acting as a performer would on stage, then her demeanor is affected and devious. If the perfect woman is childlike and guileless, the woman who performs her role as a woman must be a very bad woman. It is not in her nature to be womanly. She can be duplicitous. When Alice is so publicly scrutinized, her subjectivity is open to interpretation by others. While the guard is examining her, he, the gentleman in white paper, a goat, a beetle, and a gnat all have a chance to comment on who she is and what she should do. Alice herself has very little power.

In Wonderland, Alice understands her changes in size in relation to visual technologies such as these. When she first finds that she is too large to enter the little door into the garden, she “wishes [she] could shut up like a telescope” (13). After drinking from the bottle that says “DRINK ME” she finds that she “must be shutting up like a telescope” and later, after eating a little cake, she finds that she is “opening out like the largest telescope that ever was” (14, 16). Alice’s equating of her body to the technology of the telescope makes a metaphorical connection between the female’s body

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34 The telescope was invented in the early seventeenth century and improved by Newton in 1668 but in 1857 the new silver coated glass mirror allowed telescopes to reflect the correct colors of light and to last longer than earlier telescopes.
and that which is present, yet unseen.\textsuperscript{35} This is a very specific piece of technology which allows one to see objects in the cosmos which are invisible to the naked eye. This technology, when “shut up,” does not allow one to see cosmic bodies, yet when opened the telescope allows one to see very far into the sky. Alice’s body, when “opened out” like a telescope, is visible. This becomes very apparent when she eats a bit too much of her mushroom. She encounters a bird who finds her looming presence very disturbing. Although the telescope is not specifically mentioned in this passage, Alice’s body still represents a telescopic change. When Alice looks down at her newly grown body, “all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck” and “there seemed to be no chance of getting her hands up to her head” (47). Alice’s body has opened like the metaphoric telescope. While her neck and torso have grown longer, her arms have not, and therefore she cannot reach her hands up to her head. Alice’s body has simultaneously become the image produced by the telescope and the telescope itself. While Alice’s identity, in this case as either serpent or little girl, is once again questioned, as it almost always is when she has grown or shrunk, the bird tells her that it makes no difference which identity is hers (47-48). Alice is disturbing because she is so large. She is accused of treachery against the bird’s babies, an interesting commentary on family life and publicly visible women. Alice, a potential domestic disturbance, is contrasted to the

\textsuperscript{35}This reading once again makes Alice a girlish Lady of Shalott figure. Lancelot is described as meteor-like (98) and the Lady of Shalott is inspired to forfeit the protection of her mirror in order to look at the spectacle of him more fully. Therefore, the clear view of these celestial bodies is damaging to a woman’s modesty. Alice’s body becomes the telescope here, allowing her to see things which otherwise would not have been visible to her, but this also makes her visible to those who would not otherwise have noticed her.
Pigeon, who represents the well-domesticated woman. Not only does she spend her time hatching eggs, or reproducing, but she also vigilantly protects her home from the destructive invasion of outside forces as she is “on the look-out for serpents, night and day” (47). Alice, the highly conspicuous woman, is one of these destructive forces. This at first seems to contrast to “Pig and Pepper,” the chapter which immediately follows, however, upon closer examination the message is the same. The Duchess is represented as a non-domestic figure who is handling her baby very roughly. The reader is alerted to the fact that the duchess is not domestically inclined not only by her treatment of her baby, but also by her pictorial representation by Tennial. Just as Alice grows and shrinks as she becomes conspicuous and inconspicuous, the Duchess’s head is disproportionately large for her body. While Alice seems to take great care to kidnap the baby and remove it from the potentially harmful situation, Alice is no less conspicuous than the Duchess, and the child turns into a pig. This belittles Alice’s domestic capabilities. These instances illustrate the fear that those women who are visible in the public eye are destructive to the home and family life. Alice is criticized by the Pigeon not only because she is so tall, and therefore conspicuous, but also because this conspicuousness has the potential to upset her domestic life.

The metaphor between Alice and the telescope is imperfect. The telescope was used to collapse distance, but it did not allow viewers to effect the cosmic bodies they were viewing. Alice has the ability, whether real or imagined, to effect the world of the other characters in Wonderland. The flexibility in the metaphor allows several possibilities for analysis. On the one hand, Alice is not viewed within the telescope, nor
is she necessarily viewing Wonderland through the telescope. She is the telescope. This may be a comment on visual culture. The telescope, and other optical instruments, changed Victorian society and the way that people understood themselves and their world. The fact that Alice compares herself to the telescope supports this conclusion. However, since it was impossible for Alice to access Wonderland before she had ingested items which made her body collapse and expand like the telescope, an alternate reading is available. It is possible that Alice is using the technology in order to gain an understanding of the world which had previously been unavailable to her, literally hidden underground. In this reading, the telescope is a comment on the impossible paradox of the Ruskinian place of women in Victorian society. It is impossible to affect a world and yet be absent from it, just as it is impossible for the viewer of the stars to change them. When Alice is viewed through the telescope, she too becomes an image that can change by growing larger and smaller with an ease which a physical body could not.

Alice resists being viewed as an image. The opening relationship between Alice and the mirror in Through the Looking Glass shows that Alice’s world operates very similarly to the Lady’s in “The Lady of Shalott;” the mirror is a medium of vision through which an unfamiliar world is revealed to the female viewer. Alice is not interested in seeing herself in the mirror, but instead is interested in “the room you can see through the glass” (125). Seeing her own reflection in the mirror is not interesting to her, and in fact is considered a punishment. While Alice is playing in the drawing room, she likes to imagine herself an older, wiser advisor to her kitten. She determines that the kitten is sullen, an accusation which must have been made against Alice so that it is
foremost in her mind, and “so, to punish it, she held it up to the Looking-glass that it might see how sulky it was” (125). For Alice, the kitten represents a child who is being reprimanded, a stand-in for Alice who is quite used to being scolded. Alice considers it a punishment for the kitten to be forced to look at its own reflection. She must consider looking at herself a punishment as well. Alice’s resistance to being turned into an image, a spectacle to be examined, shows that she has learned the lessons the Victorian woman-child would have been taught. She insists on remaining inconspicuous, and therefore non-threatening, even when standing in front of a mirror. Instead of examining herself, she prefers to use the mirror to interpret others. Alice experiments with the invisibility the mirror can afford her through displacement. She can see things through it, without having to see herself.

The ability of other characters to be physically present, yet visibly absent, is a quality which is present throughout both novels. Alice learns about the logic of subvisibility through other characters. The gnat which Alice encounters helps to shed light on the meaning of subvisibility in the Looking Glass World. Once outside of the Looking Glass house, Alice encounters many things that do not visually make sense to her. At one point she can hear a “little voice,” but cannot see the person or thing to which the voice belongs (148). Alice understands that she cannot see the owner of the voice because it is very small. She deduces this because it has such a “wonderfully small sigh, that she wouldn’t have heard it at all, if it hadn’t come quite close to her ear” (148). So, she cannot see the Gnat, it is a Gnat’s voice she hears, because it is so tiny. However, being small does not eliminate its voice, it just makes it very little. The gnat’s voice
could be described as much quieter than the others, but Alice calls it small and it is depicted as a much smaller font size for the reader. This visual cue for the reader equates volume with the visual marker of font size just as Alice equates volume with bigness or smallness. When another physical change occurs in the Looking Glass World, the Gnat also changes and appears as a “very large Gnat: ‘about the size of a chicken’” and it becomes easier for Alice to hear its voice (149). The voice is the same “size” as Alice’s both visually for the reader, as the font size which depicts the Gnat’s part of the conversation becomes uniform with the rest of the text, and audibly for Alice. This is another reference to subvisibility. Invisibility, which Alice and other characters experience throughout the two books, simply requires that one is unseen. This can mean that the invisible object is obscured from sight by other, more visible objects, that the object does not actually exist, or that the invisible is not an object at all; it is an idea or an “imponderable.” However, the Gnat is not only invisible, he is subvisible. The Gnat then is a reference to a subvisible body, and, while Alice experiences invisibility in the Looking Glass house, she seems at times, through her growing and shrinking body, to strive for subvisibility in Wonderland.

While subvisibility is useful, disappearance is another method of remaining physically present but visibly absent, which is useful in the stories. In both novels the characters with the ability to appear and disappear at will have more power than those who cannot. In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, the Cheshire cat has this ability. Alice is speaking to it while it sits on the bough of a tree when it vanishes, but then it suddenly appears again, in exactly the same place. They speak a while longer and it
again vanishes and then reappears. Alice asks it to stop “appearing and vanishing so suddenly” and so the cat controls its vanishing “beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remain[s] some time after the rest of it had gone” (58-59). Alice again sees it at the Queen of Hearts’ croquet game, but this time it begins to appear with the grin. After its head is in sight, “the Cat [seems] to think that there was enough of it… and no more of it [appears]” (74-75). This indicates that the cat has the ability to control its appearance, and its vanishing, which gives it power over the other characters in Wonderland. When the King is insulted by the cat, and the Queen orders it to be beheaded, the cat’s ability to maintain only a partial image renders their orders ineffective. The executioner argues that one cannot cut off a head unless it has “a body to cut it off from” (76). Of course Alice and the reader know that the cat has a body, but its ability to keep its body hidden from sight makes it more powerful than the sovereign. The Cheshire Cat’s taunting of the King and Queen in Wonderland shows that the ability to control one’s image is crucial to a wielding of power.

In the Looking Glass World, the sovereign Queens have the ability that the Cheshire cat has in Wonderland. When walking with Alice, for example, the Red Queen simply “vanishes.” Alice does not understand how it happens that the Red Queen is present one moment and gone the next. She wonders whether the Queen “vanished into the air, or whether she ran quickly into the wood” (144). The use of the term “vanish” both here and in reference to the Cheshire Cat is very interesting. While it can metaphorically mean to cease to exist, the term itself means to “disappear from sight” or to “become invisible, esp. in a rapid and mysterious manner” (“vanish”). In the novel,
the reader knows that the Queen does not cease to exist physically, as Alice will see her again in the story. Instead, the physical body of the Queen is simply no longer visible, either due to her distance from Alice, or her control over her image. The physical world is not revealed to Alice through her visual experience of it. Indeed Alice herself must reconcile the vanishing of the Queen, since she knows that the Queen did not cease to exist, with the physical phenomenon of running very quickly, so quickly that Alice’s eyes cannot see it. Alice blames the limitations of her eyes, and their inability to focus on quickly moving objects, for her inability to see the Red Queen.

By the end of the novel, Alice is much more used to these disappearances and reappearances. After Alice has achieved her own Queenhood, she sits down alone, but does not “feel a bit surprised at finding the Red Queen and the White Queen sitting close to her, one on each side” (220). While she is not surprised by the sudden appearance of the queens, she still does not understand how the sudden visibility and invisibility operates and “would have liked very much to ask them how they came there” (220). She does not ask, however, and instead is subjected to a frustrating and confusing lesson on Queenliness. The two queens fall asleep in her lap, but “the two great heads suddenly [vanish] from her lap” and she finds herself “standing before an arched doorway, over which were the words ‘Queen Alice’ in large letters” (226). This sudden movement of Alice, from sitting beneath a tree to standing at a door, is similar to other movements throughout the novel. She often feels like she is doing one thing, but suddenly finds herself doing something else. For example, she thinks she is walking but then is actually on a train, or she feels as though she is walking in the woods but finds she is actually in a
shop (145-46; 174). The disappearance and sudden appearance of the queens suggest that when Alice thinks that the scenery suddenly changes, it could be an indication that she has disappeared from one location and has arrived in another. She has this ability because she is reduced to an image when she moves through the looking glass; her body does not move, her image simply appears and disappears in different locales. Onlookers in the wood, may perceive Alice as vanishing, but she perceives herself as suddenly being in a shop. Alice, then, may have the ability that the queens have of disappearing and reappearing, but she does not understand it. The physical world may be stable and Alice’s body as image, may have the ability to move fluidly through it while avoiding the scrutinizing glance of others.

Language and Other Tricks of Perception

Alice is constantly attempting to make sense of her perception of the dream worlds, but meaning is as fluid in them as is her movement through the Looking Glass World. As Alice struggles to understand the rules of these strange societies, the reader is given various models for understanding Alice. Alice assumes she has faulty eyes, providing the reader with a clue that visual perception is not always accurate of the physical world. But other means of classifying the material world are by no means more stable. Sight often takes precedence over language and bodily experience. Visual logic often prevails in the Looking Glass World and in Wonderland, and the fluidity between the physical and visual worlds is often enabled by language. Alice is constantly attempting to discern, or interpret her vision, and to explain her vision through language.
Seeing oneself is a punishment that Alice inflicts upon her kitten. However, Alice feels that having her vision restricted from seeing an outside world is a hardship as well. The mirror it seems, could be put to much better use than examining oneself, instead Alice thinks the looking glass could be used as a window to an alternative world, if only it were not constrained by the pesky frame. When looking into the mirror to see beyond it, Alice states, “I do so wish I could see that bit!” (126). James Kincaid has read this as constructing a punishment for which Alice longs. He explores this idea of longing for punishment in his work, Child Loving. He argues that the naughty child “is loved, the child is spanked” because “that’s what the child wants and needs” (247). In his argument, the reader is told this so that he may enact the spanking of the child which fulfills an erotic need for the adult. In the Alice books, Kincaid argues, there are characters who scold Alice so that the reader can feel this function is fulfilled (294-95). Alice’s relationship with the mirror should not be construed as one of those instances. Alice does not long to look at herself in the mirror, which is constructed as punishment, she longs to see what the constraints of the mirror do not allow her to observe.

If Alice considers it a punishment to be the object of sight, even her own sight, then having her sight constrained, and therefore not being able to see other objects, is also a punishment. Rather than longing for punishment, Alice instead longs for the ability to see with an unconstrained eye—to be able to see everything she desires. This longing is representative of a larger issue in the visual logic of the Victorian world, and even in today’s society, namely that there were things which were considered unfit for women and children to see. However, rather than abandoning the mirror as the Lady of Shalott
does, Alice utilizes the visual technology as a gateway to more direct experience. Alice passes through the glass lens of the mirror, much as she passes through the camera obscura of the rabbit hole. Notably, walking through the looking glass does not immediately make Alice open for scrutiny as turning away from the mirror does for the Lady of Shalott. Instead, walking through the mirror both protects Alice from scrutiny in the Looking Glass house, as she becomes invisible, and protects her from invaders from her own “real” world. By stepping into the Looking Glass house, Alice protects herself from the potentially objectifying gaze of the mirror. Alice revels in the “fun it’ll be” when others can see her through the glass but “ca’n’t get at me!” (127). Others will be able to see Alice, but this will not give them control over her, therefore robbing those seers of the power of the gaze. Once she has stepped into the protection of the constrained sight of the mirror, Alice becomes omnipotent, able to move the other characters and write her thoughts instead of their own. However, as soon as she leaves the house, she is no longer invisible.

The incident with the Gnat, quite literally, illustrates that everything in the Looking Glass World works through the rules of visual logic. Visual logic requires that the physical rules which govern vision are used to intellectually understand and order other non-visual experiences of life. For example, the Looking Glass house and the Looking Glass World are all governed through a logic of inversion because the looking glass offers a mirror image of the world with which Alice is familiar. The first instance of this occurs when Alice finds a “Looking-glass book” which must be held up to a mirror for the words to “all go the right way again” (131). The book is the poem
“JABBERWOCKY” and the words in it are printed backwards so that, by holding it up to the mirror, the reflection is inverted and the text becomes legible. The visual trick is illustrated for the reader, much like it is in the incident with the Gnat. The actual printing of the title and first stanza of the poem is printed backwards so that the reader may hold it up to a looking glass and participate in the fun of visual logic.\textsuperscript{36} Notably, the relationship between the visual and language is drawn here. The visual is more powerful, only allowing language to be understood once the visual is appeased.

Written language is a means of communication which relies on vision, and therefore the ability of the mirror to interrupt the interpretation of writing is unsurprising. However, outside of the house, other, non-visual experiences, such as movement are effected by the logic of inversion because they are accessed through entering the mirror. When Alice attempts to leave the house and view the garden from the top of the hill, no matter how resolutely she attempts to walk away from the house and towards the hill, she always ends up walking back into the front door. The Rose in the flower garden advises her to “walk the other way” and Alice decides to “try the plan, this time, of walking in the opposite direction” (139). This plan succeeds and she is able to meet with the Red Queen in “full sight of the hill she had been so long aiming at” (140). Her physical movement is dictated by the inversion required of the visual logic of the looking glass which literally illustrated for the reader in the Jabberwocky poem. This inversion is maintained throughout the novel. When attempting to cut a cake, Alice finds she must “hand it round

\textsuperscript{36} In a note on the poem Haughton suggests that the “reverse” printing was restricted to the first stanza because the cost would be very high to print the entire poem backwards (328n10).
first, and cut it afterwards” and the physical sensation of thirst is apparently quenched by eating a biscuit for the looking glass creatures (203; 143).\(^{37}\) For them all physical sensations are apparently dominated by inversion. The White Queen cries and bleeds because she knows she will prick her finger, but once she has pricked her finger she is done with the screaming (173). She has experienced the pain and the bleeding, the effect, before she experiences the prick, the cause. Effects come before causes in the rhetoric of the Looking Glass house, an order the King of Hearts would like to instate in his Wonderland courtroom. Similarly, memories are of events that will happen in the future and punishment is served before the crime is committed (172). Aural experience can also be inverted, however these instances are not so stable. The Gnat, for example, has a “small voice” when he is small, but when Haigha attempts to whisper in the White King’s ear, he shouts “at the top of his voice” (198). The Looking Glass creatures experience their physical sensations and physical movements in reverse, as well as cause and effects in reverse, because their experience is dictated by the visual logic of the mirror. Things appear in reverse when looking at them through a mirror; therefore, all sensation must be in reverse once one has entered the looking glass. The visual logic of the looking glass, then, dictates that all experiences are mitigated through a visual understanding of the world.

In the looking glass, the physical world is a representation of visual logic; physical laws which usually dominate the “real” world are generally trumped by Alice’s sight. The first instance of this is in her first foray into the looking glass. While the real

\(^{37}\) Notably Alice is not actually a looking glass creature, so the biscuit only makes her more thirsty than ever.
world dictates that the room one sees in the looking glass is simply a reflection of the room it is facing, for Alice it is another room. She can see an inversion of her drawing room in the looking glass, and therefore it must exist. One room, and its inverted reflection, becomes two and Alice passes through the looking glass into another physical dimension (127). In many instances Alice’s physical sensation of movement does not match her visual experience of it. When she is walking, or running, with the Red Queen, “the Queen [walks] so fast that it [is] all [Alice can] do to keep up with her,” yet “the trees and other things round them never [change] their places at all: however fast they [run], they never [seem] to pass anything” (141-42). In this experience, Alice feels as though she is moving very quickly, but the scenery, dictated by her sight, tells her that she has not moved “at all.”

This disconnect between physical movement and the visual experience of it is one that is tied to modernity and train travel, so it is not surprising that in the next chapter Alice is walking, only to find herself suddenly on a train. Dante Gabriel Rossetti explores the same phenomenon of sight during train travel in his poem, “A Trip to Paris and Belgium.” When “seen through fences or a bridge far off, trees that in moving keep their intervals/ still one ‘twixt bar and bar” (9-11). The trees are not moving, but the train traveler is observing them at such a distance that they hardly appear to change and always seem to be placed in regular intervals. However, the train traveler is startled when “brick walls we pass between, passed so at once/ that for the suddenness I cannot know/ or what, or where begun, or where at end” (21-23). In this instance the scenery is so close to the train that the traveler cannot focus on it before it is out of sight. Yet, all the while the
“shaking” reminds the traveler of his physical movement in the train (7). What Alice is describing then is related to the modern optical phenomenon produced during train travel. When far from the object one is observing, the object hardly seems to be moving while the human body is constantly reminded of the speed of travel by the shaking of the body. When the object one is observing is very close to the window of the train, the object moves bewilderingly fast. The speed does not allow the observer to understand what the object is, yet the body does not feel that it is moving any faster than it was when observing the very slow movement of the far off scenery. Alice’s body, when unfettered by the train, feels that it is moving very fast, yet the scenery is never changing. When she is suddenly on a train, it is not clear that she has covered any ground at all. Alice’s visual experience echoes that of the modern train traveler. The train itself is a symbol of modernity, science, the fear of technology and what it could do to the visual experiences of the human body. If the train, or symbolic understanding of the train, dictates Alice’s visual experience when she is walking, then when she suddenly appears on the train the trick is a visual trick. Her physical body feels that she is running, yet the scenery tells her she is not moving. Then her physical body feels as though it is walking, and her visual experience tells her that suddenly, she is on a train (146). In these instances, it is her physical experience that is lying to her. Her visual experience is the one which takes precedence.

Her experience with the White Queen has much the same effect on Alice’s visual and physical world as does her walk with the Red Queen. As they stroll along, the White Queen suddenly becomes a sheep. Alice blames her eyes for the change rather than
considering the Queen’s/sheep’s body unstable. When the Queen appears to have turned into a sheep, “Alice rubbed her eyes and looked again” knowing that this change is unlikely in the physical world (174). Alice finds that her eyes tell her that she is in a shop, rather than walking in a wood, and she is speaking with a sheep, rather than conversing with the White Queen. While she attempts to correct her eyesight, and to create a scenario in which the reality of her vision matches her presumptions of the material limitations of her surroundings, “rub as she would, she could make nothing more of it: she was in a little dark shop… and opposite her was an old Sheep” (175). In the shop her eyes do not appear to be working, no matter how much she rubs them. The physicality of the rub does not “fix” Alice’s visual experience because her physical experience is only accessed through vision. The egg which she is attempting to examine continues to float further and further up the shelves until it becomes larger and larger, and then transforms into Humpty Dumpty (180-81). As soon as Humpty Dumpty becomes large, Alice has no trouble fixing him with her gaze. This is another instance of subvisibility. When the egg is small, she knows it is there but cannot examine it. As soon as Humpty Dumpty is large, Alice’s eyes easily focus on him. In the Looking Glass World, then, there is a chasm between what Alice’s eyes show her and what she expects from the world. Alice blames her faulty eyes for this.

The sudden appearances and disappearances which proliferate in the Looking Glass World recall the Cheshire Cat’s appearances and disappearances in Wonderland, yet Alice’s reaction is different. In Wonderland, she assumes that the cat has control over his physical body and can hide it at will. She does not blame her eyes as she does in the
Looking Glass Land. However, the laws of vision may govern wonderland as well. David Piggins calls the Cat’s ability to have only certain parts of his body appear the “Cheshire Cat Effect or Phenomenon” and argues that it is a reference, whether purposeful or incidental on Carroll’s part, to the stabilized retinal image. The stabilized retinal image is a phenomenon where, when the retina focuses on the same image for a long period of time, and the retina is fixed on that image, the visual field looses clarity and begins to look featureless. This is a physical phenomenon that happens because the human biological eye responds to changes in its visual field and therefore cannot keep a fixed image in focus for more than about twenty seconds (42-43). This too was a theory that was prevalent in discussions of the eye and visual technologies in the nineteenth century around the time that Carroll was writing. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to imagine that ideas from this scientific observation would influence the writer. This reading supports Alice’s conclusion in the Looking Glass World; her eyes are defective and this is why she cannot see the cat.

The relationship between vision and power in the Looking Glass World coupled with Alice’s constant blaming of her own eyes for the strange visual phenomena she experiences and the stabilized retinal image of the Cheshire Cat, encourage the reader to reexamine Alice’s growing and shrinking body in Wonderland. Perhaps Alice’s size fluctuations are a function of the readerly “eye.” The reader is subjected to visual trickery. Carroll is insisting that Alice is a little girl, and we see her as such. However, Carroll also maintains that the reader of Victorian society can easily decipher when Alice becomes powerful because there must be some visual marker, one that indicates the
underlying monstrosity. Her ability to turn at any moment into a femme fatale is symbolized for the reader by fluctuations in her size. Her image grows as her power does. Yet, Alice is the same little girl. While her body is small, she is the perfect woman-child. As Kincaid points out, she is adult enough to strive to find order in the world, and as Empson points out, she is small enough that the animals are not threatened by her and are friendly (Kincaid 289, Empson 270). However, when she grows, the animals oppose her and her body becomes frightening. Alice’s body is described in such a way that the reader may have an optical indication of her person. The miniature woman-child is the ingénue; the gigantic girl is the femme fatale.

How the reader perceives Alice is complicated, as the ways in which Alice perceives the dream worlds is complicated, by the fluidity of language characterized by the enigmatic classification of Alice as a “little” girl even when she is nine feet tall. Just as inversion is necessary for understanding the JABBERWOCKY poem, sight often belies language. When Alice is chatting with the Gnat in the Looking Glass World, he begins telling her the names of the insects. The Rocking-horse-fly looks like a freshly repainted rocking horse with wings, the Snap-dragon-fly’s “body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly-leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy,”38 and the Bread-and-butter-fly is made of “thin slices of bread-and-butter, its body crust, and its head is a lump of sugar” (149-151). The images that are connected to the names of the insects, both the illustrations and verbal descriptions of them, are literal visual representations of what the words convey. This is considered “nonsense,” but Carroll

38 Haughton explains that Snap-Dragon was a holiday game in which players grabbed raisins out of a bowl of flaming brandy (137n11).
seems to be questioning why this must be nonsense. Linda M. Shires points out that “by questioning the seemingly natural way in which words express intention and refer to things, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland foregrounds the process of sense-making and sense-unmaking” (272). This examination and questioning of words and the objects to which they refer happens throughout the Looking Glass World. Here, Carroll is pointing out that in the “real” world the names of insects, like the horsefly or the butterfly, have nothing to do with their appearance. The horsefly does not look like a horse, and the butterfly does not look like butter. These names are linguistically illogical leaps, yet they are “normal” in Alice’s world. The language that is used to describe things is not necessarily important in the “real” world. One can call a butterfly a butterfly because it is a butterfly. Since everyone knows what a butterfly looks like, there is no confusion between what a deconstruction of the word might imply. It does not have to be made of butter in order for the name to make sense, instead the “real” world classifies it as a butterfly because it is one. Therefore, the “real” world is made up of our arbitrary classifications of visual experience, which is more real than the linguistic symbolic signs that are used to describe that visual experience.

This disconnect between an object’s appearance and what it is called continues in both books. In Through the Looking Glass Tweedledum’s and Tweedledee’s armor is made up of different household items. Alice helps Tweedledum tie his helmet on but she remembers that “he called it a helmet, though it certainly looked much more like a saucepan” (167). In Wonderland, when she is observing the footman approaching the Duchess’s house she “[considers] him to be a footman because he was in livery:
otherwise, judging by his face only, she would have called him a fish” (50). In both of these incidents there is a question as to what a thing really “is” if it looks like one thing but is called another. Which is more powerful? The word helmet or “look” of the saucepan? When there are two visual markers, which one is more real: the livery, which would indicate that the person is a footman, or the face, which would indicate that the person is actually a fish? Herman Rapaport points out that “talk accompanies vision in the Alice books,” yet the language used “does not clarify the enigmatic knots of perception” (58). When Alice searches for the correct words for what she sees, she is pointing out that she cannot adequately describe her perception with language and that the visions of the worlds are more clear indicators of Looking Glass and Wonderland “reality.” The language with which Alice is armed to describe these new worlds is often faulty and inadequate.

The very fluid relationship between the language used to describe the visual and the physical is brought into focus when Tweedledum and Tweedledee argue about who is a more effective hitter. Tweedledee boasts: “‘I generally hit every thing I can see’” and Tweedledum retorts: “‘I hit everything within reach… whether I can see it or not!’” (168). Dum’s reply indicates that things can be physically present without being visible. The relationship between the physical world and the visible one is not always stable then, but it is more stable than the linguistic world which often uses the term “see” and other visual monikers metaphorically. This relationship is echoed during the mad tea party when the Hatter points out the fault in thinking that saying “‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see’” when they are “Not the same thing a bit” (61). Carroll points out the
fraught relationship between seeing, the physical world, and linguistic turns of phrase. The colloquialisms, and arbitrarily named objects, are often inaccurate representations of the world. Yet the linguistic representations of the world are often the one’s which are considered most accurate. Therefore, the fluidity between the visual and physical world is enabled by language.

The language used to describe people and their visual presence in the world has the potential to put their subjectivities at risk. In a telling exchange between the White King and Alice, the relationship between the visible subject and the problem of (in)visibility is addressed. The White King asks Alice to look down the road to see if either of his messengers is coming. She says: “I see nobody on the road” (194). While this is a common phrase which means “I do not see anyone on the road” the phrase does not literally mean that. The King takes Alice literally and exclaims: “I only wish I had such eyes… To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why it’s as much as I can do to see real people, by this light” (194). There is a difference between seeing nothing, an active version of sight, and not being able to see anything, a passive version of sight. The fun in the exchange is the difference between the common colloquialism with its figurative meaning and the literal meaning of the phrase. Alice and the King have trouble communicating because he interprets the phrase literally. However, this particular turn of phrase is loaded with cultural and social meaning. Notice in Alice’s sentence, nobody is written as a lower case, indicating that she uses it as the common pronoun. When the King talks about Nobody, the word is capitalized, indicating that Nobody is taking the place of a name. Nobody for the king is not a “real” person, yet
since Alice can see Nobody the person who is invisible to the king and not “real” somehow exists, if only in the King’s mind. The difference being pointed out in this exchange is not just the meaning between what Alice says and what the King understands, but also between what Alice can see as opposed to what the King can see. The King, as a sovereign and a member of the upper ruling class, cannot see those who are nobody. Shires points out that Alice has no problem seeing and speaking with lower class entities (278-79). Alice can see the nobodies because, as a woman and a child, she is a nobody herself. The King’s use of a pronoun rather than a name to refer to these people who are beneath his notice indicates that not only are they subvisible to him, but also their very identities are obscure to him. Nobodies are simply political subjects who have no individual subjectivities, or at least none that matter to the King. Therefore, having no name renders these Nobodies not only physically subvisible to the King, but also linguistically invisible. This linguistic invisibility threatens subjectivity.

This instance of threatening invisibility in the Looking Glass and Alice’s fear of becoming Mabel in Wonderland suggest that names are very important for individual subjectivity, both in these dream worlds and in Victorian society. However, because they are merely linguistic representations, they are very fluid and can therefore be easily separated from the people to whom they belong by political, rather than natural, institutions. Other examples of the problems with namelessness are present in other Victorian texts. The best example is Wilkie Collins’ *No Name*. Titled specifically after the problem this lack of a name may present, the novel explores this same theme through the legal ramifications for children. When the Vanstone sisters are orphaned, they find
that their parents were not married at the time of their births and so they have no legal right to their father’s name or their inheritances. This lack of a legal “name” is clearly detrimental to the sisters’ social standing. Caroline Norton explores this same problem which the lack of a legal name poses to the married woman. She points out that “A married woman in England has no legal existence: her being is absorbed in that of her husband” (146). This lack of legal standing for married women is popularly conceptualized as the loss of the woman’s “maiden” name in favor of her husband’s. When the woman assumes her husbands’ name through marriage, she literally loses herself legally and forfeits her rights. She becomes legally construed as property. Through this lack of a name, women experience linguistic invisibility.

Although much too young for marriage and apparently well-bred, Alice experiences the frightfulness of linguistic invisibility in the Looking Glass and finds that it has both advantages and disadvantages.\(^39\) When she is approaching the Wood with No Name she and the Gnat ponder the usefulness of having no name, and therefore being linguistically invisible. When Alice and the Gnat begin comparing Looking Glass insects to the insects with which Alice is familiar at home, the Gnat wonders “what’s the use of [the insects] having names… if they wo’n’t answer to them?” (149). The questionable usefulness of the names of insects is not only tied to their faulty visual indicators then, but it is also tied to the purpose of the names. The insects do not respond to their names, therefore one cannot control them and make them answer when called. Their names do

\(^{39}\) This is yet another place where Alice is very much like the Lady of Shalott. Although she is named Elaine in other versions of the poem, in The Lady of Shalott the maiden has no name. This contributes to her invisible haunting presence in Camelot.
not indicate what or who they are, just as a butterfly is not made of butter, and therefore
do not indicate their individual subjectivity. Their names are used for classification
purposes only, which is a function of political subjectivity. However, the insects do not
answer to their names, so their political subjectivity is not complete. The person who has
control over the insects’ names has no control over them. Alice, on the other hand, does
not experience this freedom.

Alice is upper class and as such her name is less easily divided from her which
can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. The upper class man generally has a
distinctive name which maintains his legal standing. Ironically, an upper class woman
forfeits this name and the legal protection it affords in taking her husband’s name. By
forfeiting her name and becoming nameless, the upper class woman can also potentially
forfeit her class status. When the Gnat points out “how convenient it would be” for Alice
to lose her name because the governess would not be able to call her name for lessons,
Alice reasons that the governess would simply call her “‘Miss,’ as the servants do” (151-
52). Alice is still part of a socio-political system where, as an upper class person, she
always has a name. While in this example of a governess summoning it seems that the
child is the one without power, the child actually has power over the governess because
she is part of the upper class family who has hired the teacher. When Alice finally enters
the wood, she finds what it is to be without a name, and namelessness proves to be useful.
She meets a fawn in the wood, and since she and the Fawn cannot remember their names,
the Fawn is not frightened of her. When they get out of the wood, the Fawn remembers
that it is a fawn, and realizes that Alice is a human child (153-155). The Fawn runs away
frightened of Alice, while it was not frightened of her at all in the wood. This is an instance where being invisible, if only linguistically, is once again useful to Alice. Yet, the loss of her name in the wood is also frightful to Alice. She thinks that when she has lost her name, some other looking glass creature can begin using it and therefore take Alice’s identity. She wonders if she will have to call everything Alice until someone answers. Although she claims that it would be fun to try this experiment, she warns that “they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise” (152) therefore, the “multiple possible ‘Alices’ pose a threat to [her] individual identity” (White 117). So, the invisibility namelessness allows is both advantageous and frightening to Alice.

This incident together with the usefulness and anxiety associated with subvisibility help to illuminate the ways in which Alice must learn to use her ability to become as inconspicuous as possible. When Alice is with the Fawn, she seems innocuous and therefore the Fawn is not frightened. If Alice can harness this linguistic and metaphoric subvisibility, yet retain her powers of observation and interpretation, she can be like the person using a telescope. The observer in a telescope is distanced from the object of observation by both physical distance and the optical device. Therefore the observer cannot be observed, but can still examine. This is the optimal use for subvisibility. In the books, Alice also has the power to effect the world around her while she is unseen. This is very similar to the ways in which Ruskin would like women to be trained; they should remain hidden from society, yet they should be constantly influencing the world for the better. This is dangerous for women and for Alice. Alice fears that any other creature can take her name when she is removed from it. This is the
danger of subvisibility. Being removed from the sight of the world allows others to have power over one’s self. This echoes the problem Caroline Norton complains of in her essay, that the woman has no power over herself or her belongings once she has been removed from her name. However, there is also a great power in invisibility. The Cheshire Cat cannot be executed when he makes parts of his body disappear, Alice can manipulate the world of the chess pieces when she is invisible, and she can easily blend into an entirely different society when she is small. Even when threatened with others usurping her name while she is in the woods, her violent reaction shows that she is willing to exert herself in order to remain powerful over others.

Alice Produces (and Subsequently Loses) Meaning

Throughout the novels, Alice strives for power. Her efforts to name others in the world and maintain her name illustrate her desire to produce meaning. While Alice attains power in the dream worlds, both novels end with this power being dissolved as the dream fades. Alice produces meaning, becoming a powerful femme fatale, but eventually returns to her childlike ingénue status.

Invisibility functions very much like the mirror in “The Lady of Shalott” in that it allows Alice the opportunity to produce meaning, like the Lady’s tapestry, while remaining invisible to the creatures in the looking glass house. Being invisible does not rob Alice of her voice, but it makes her voice covert and, therefore, more powerful. In both the Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass Alice is preoccupied with royalty and the power that the royals do or do not have. The political
environment in which Alice finds herself echoes the political climate within which Carroll was writing. Two different political situations were occurring during the Victorian period which questioned the amount of power the sovereigns held. First, while women were still primarily excluded from public life, Queen Victoria was the sovereign ruler. This seems to be an anomaly in a political system which excluded women and women’s participation, and a legal system in which married women did not exist as entities separate from their husbands. Caroline Norton points out the “grotesque anomaly which ordains that married women shall be ‘non-existent’ in a country governed by a female sovereign” (144). Laura Mooneyham White argues that Victoria, by portraying herself as a “mother of the nation,” assuaged the anxiety of having a Queen as the most prominent public figure in a society which ascribed to the ideology of separate spheres. She cites Victoria’s increasingly rounded figure after pregnancies and the portraits often taken of her surrounded by her children to support this argument (110-112). Second, all sovereigns in England had decreasing power as parliament became more and more powerful. Bills proposed and passed by parliament needed the royal assent in order to become law, but the king or queen could not arbitrarily instate laws which had not previously been passed by parliament. The sovereign was both omnipotent and powerless, maintaining only the power of denial.

Alice finds that she can overpower the sovereigns in the Looking Glass House because she is larger than they are and because they cannot see her. After she picks the chess pieces up off of the floor, the King begins writing a memorandum of his experience. Alice takes “hold of the end of the pencil, which came some way over his
shoulder, and [begins] writing for him” (130). Her invisibility allows her to overpower the King, a symbol of the sovereign and the public world, and to express her thoughts without resistance. The White Queen reads the memorandum and tells the King, “That’s not a memorandum of your feelings” (131). Yet, the queen does not know whose feelings these are.

One of the great anxieties of the Victorian period was of an “other” surreptitiously overtaking England. Xenophobia, class struggle, and the emphatic discussions against the burgeoning women’s rights movement are all symptomatic of a fear that the country would soon be controlled by someone other than the voting classes and parliament, all upper class men. The increasing power of parliament could be seen as contributing to this fear. Just as the parliament had enjoyed increasing power since the signing of the Magna Carta, so too could the power once again shift away from this ruling body. This allows for multiple interpretations of the scene. Alice could be parliament, voicing an opinion which is overtaking the king’s own memorandum. However, the King could also represent parliament, the male ruling power in England, which is being overpowered by Alice, a covert force, in this case female empowerment, which has influence to overtake the ruling class. Nancy Armstrong significantly argues that the “voracious woman,” Alice, is a substitute for the native body. As such, the Alice books are read as the fear that natives from the colonized countries are invading England and consuming the “motherland” (207-230). What Alice writes is equally telling. She notes that “The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly” (131). Haughton points out that the White Knight is a travesty of the revival of an older aesthetic, the pre-Raphaelite
obsession with the medieval chivalric knight (xlviii). This knight is a product of an older system of class and power based on land ownership and gentry. The knight is tottering atop a slippery poker, notably on his way down, just as this older version of power and class has also been dismantled. Alice, as the covert force controlling the pencil, has the ability to overtake the King and ominously suggests that this ruling class is on the verge of destruction.

All three types of invisibility, obscurity, subvisibility, and linguistic invisibility, exist only in relation to a sovereign “seer.” In the novels the sovereign is represented by the queens and kings that populate the texts. The multiple symbols of sovereignty in each encourage Alice to question who has the power to actually order and organize the world. In Through the Looking Glass the question broached throughout the novel is: whose dream is this? Tweedledee and Tweedledum seem to think that it is the Red King’s dream, and that Alice, and they themselves, would cease to exist if the king were to stop dreaming. This is a product of the King’s imagination. Therefore, the Tweedles argue, Alice is not real; she exists only because the King is literally seeing her in his imagination. Alice begins to cry at the suggestion that she is not real but eventually convinces herself that “they are talking nonsense… and its foolish to cry about it” (164-65). From this first instance alone, the fear that she is not real seems to be uppermost in Alice’s mind, but later in the book we have insight into what is actually disturbing Alice. After the Lion and the Unicorn are drummed out of town, Alice wonders if she dreamed them up, but the plate from which she cut their plum cake remains. Alice concludes: “I wasn’t dreaming, after all… unless—unless we’re all part of the same dream. Only I do
hope it’s my dream, and not the Red King’s! I don’t like belonging to another person’s dream… I’ve a great mind to go and wake him, and see what happens” (205). Here it is clear that Alice is not afraid of not existing, as she is willing to go and wake the King even though that has the potential to destroy her very self. Alice is not worried about what is real and what is not real, instead she cares about who creates the reality within which she lives. She does not mind existing within a dream world, as long as it can be her own dream—her own vision. Alice objects to living within a reality, even a dream reality, which is created by someone else. This other person is the representative of the sovereign. If the dream is his, and all the characters belong solely to the dream, then they are all his political subjects. Alice has no objection to political subjectivity, she just wants to be the one with the power in the political arrangement. She wants the dream to be hers so that she has the power to create and control others.

Alice, then, aspires to power.

Although the idealized woman was childlike and free of affect, the paradoxes of maintaining childhood while a grown woman and remaining in the home while responsible for the public, lead to a problem that proliferates in Victorian literature. The pure and good woman, the innocent ingénue, always has the potential to turn at any moment into the powerful femme fatale. Just as Alice, envisioned as the wide-eyed child, has been playing her role as the ingénue throughout the two books, her aspiring to power, and her eventual gain of this power illustrates the power of the femme fatale in the popular imagination. The femme fatale is always envisioned in her relationship to male characters. Therefore, it is not surprising when Ruskin entreats women to “be
always queens to your lovers; queens to your husbands and your sons” that the domestic queenship is envisaged in relationship to the men who would populate the woman’s life (Selected Writings 171). Indeed, his entire premise for the justification of women’s education is that without it, women are useless to men. Ruskin’s version of queenliness gives women no political power and instead reduces their movement in the public world to figuratively bringing their domicile with them wherever they go (159). While it seems as though Alice has no relationship to men in the novels, the sexualized nature of Alice and her dream worlds, not to mention the speculations about the sexual love between Alice Liddell and Charles Dodgson, may have something to do with critics noticing this grasping at power which Alice experiences. Although she is a child, Kincaid points out that Alice is very adult-like throughout the two texts. When at the end of Through the Looking Glass she is impatient for the White Knight to ride off so that “she can trip quickly over the last brook and be a Queen,” Kincaid argues that the very act of becoming a Queen implies “mat[ing] a King, and confirm[ing] her betrayal” of her childhood (298). Alice shuns her childhood when she learns to be powerful which requires her to abandon innocence and become spectacularly affected and wily. This destroys the ideal of the Victorian “woman-child” and leaves Alice to become a monstrous, undomesticated woman.

In both texts, Alice aspires to the position of the sovereign. In both, she gains power as she learns to play by the rules of the land (Pierce 749). Her character at the beginning of each novel represents the ingénue. At the beginning of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland she does not understand the way that Wonderland works. Her growing
and shrinking is a mystery to her, the fact that animals can speak is strange and wonderful to her, and the speech patterns which make up “polite” conversation in Wonderland evade her. She is unaffected, as she cannot even lie to make polite conversation. She cannot help but mention her cat Dinah, even though the mouse is very uncomfortable talking about a cat. She cannot even help herself from mentioning Dinah’s great ability to catch birds even though most of her animal company must be very offended by this fact (21-23; 29). In Through the Looking Glass she remembers the lesson that she learned in Wonderland and begins by attempting not to offend. As she walks with the Red Queen, Alice contradicts the Queen’s logic but quickly curtseys because she is “afraid from the Queen’s tone that she was a little offended” (140). In the Looking Glass world, however, one who cannot speak candidly has no power. By attempting to appease the Queen with curtseys and deference, Alice is performing her role as the political subject to the dominant Queen.

As she learns the rules for speech, sight, and movement in both worlds, she becomes devious and affected. While playing croquet in Wonderland, Alice modifies her words in order to be less offensive to the Queen. When the Cheshire Cat asks her how she likes the Queen, Alice responds, “‘not at all… she’s so extremely’ Just then she notice[s] that the Queen [is] close behind her, listening: so she went on ‘—likely to win’” (75). By realizing that she must not say what she truly means because the Queen is listening, Alice shows that she has learned to flatter rather than offend. By doing so, she
has also learned to get her way. While Alice has learned to use flattery in Wonderland, by the end of her journey in the Looking Glass world, Alice has learned to use riddles rather than telling the truth in order to retain power while avoiding conflict. When she is being ruthlessly questioned by the Red and White Queens, Alice uses logic to confuse the questions the Queens are asking. Rather than attempt to translate fiddle-dee-dee into French, or to fail at doing so, Alice simply offers that she will translate it into French if the Queens can tell her what language it is. This confuses the Queens and leaves Alice with more power than they have, a position which is supported by her singing lullabies to the Queens who fall asleep in her lap (223-226). They become infantilized, and more perfect domestic figures, when she becomes more powerful and devious. White argues that “Carroll shows that girls who take on queenly attributes become warped by the exercise of authority; they become capable of callousness, violence, egoism, and other autocratic flaws” (113). Indeed, by the end of the her time in Wonderland Alice is knocking a jury box over and scattering cards, and by the end of her time in the Looking Glass World she is pulling a table cloth off the banquet table and shaking a Queen. She becomes more and more conspicuous the more powerful she becomes. Alice’s deviousness, along with her aspirations for power, make her character at the end of each novel closer to a femme fatale than an ingénue. While the ingénue is socially and politically harmless, the femme fatale has the power to undermine society with her deviousness at any time. Therefore, while the proper, innocuous, upperclass woman is

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40 We are left wondering what Alice thinks the Queen so extremely is. One possibility is that she finds the Queen extremely domineering. This is ironic as Alice’s greatest desire is to be domineering over others.
invisible, even from the law, the dangerous one must be highly conspicuous as Alice is when she is “more than a mile high” (Carroll 104).

In Wonderland her conspicuousness is apparent when the queen is questioning her in the rose garden. The Queen of Hearts asks Alice who the three cards are who are lying under the rose trees. The Queen’s direct address to Alice indicates that Alice already has power. The Queen assumes that Alice has some control over or knowledge of the three cards. Interestingly, the Queen does not ask the three cards directly; they are only the three gardeners who were painting the roses red. The fact that the Queen asks Alice shows that Alice is worthy of the Queen’s notice, or that she is “naturally prominent” (Batchelor 186). The Queen looks to Alice to produce meaning. The three cards are like the “Nobodies” that the Red King in the Looking Glass world cannot see and therefore cannot notice. In both of these instances, Alice is distinguished from being a nobody by her conspicuousness which is tied to her burgeoning power. And, in this exchange, Alice demonstrates that she has more power than the Queen. Although she knows that the cards are the gardeners, Alice answers: “How should I know?... It’s no business of mine” (72) insisting that the insignificant “nobodies” are subvisible to her as well. When the Queen of Hearts orders Alice to be beheaded for her insolence, Alice simply replies “‘Nonsense!’ very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent” (72). Alice’s single word is more powerful than the Queen’s order; she staves off the beheading simply by calling the order nonsense.

This newfound power is coupled with her growing size. Alice’s power and size literally upset the social order. When Alice is sitting in the courtroom, she finds herself
growing larger and larger. While previously she had been able to control her size change, as she becomes more and more bold, she also finds herself growing larger and larger without being able to control herself. As in the rest of the novel, when Alice is very large, she is also very conspicuous. The court itself is a symbol of social order. The legal system enforces laws and ensures that those who have transgressed them are punished appropriately. However, Alice forgets how large she has grown and “jump[s] up in such a hurry that she [tips] over the jury-box with the edge of her skirt, upsetting all the jurymen on to the heads of the crowd below” (102-103). Alice’s size, a representation of her power, is so astonishing that it literally upsets the entire social order, represented by the jury, and turns it on its head. Interestingly, it is not her hand or her elbow which does so, it is specifically her skirt which upsets the social order. The skirt, as a symbol of her gender, is problematic when so large and powerful. While her new impudence makes her grow large, her large size makes her more bold, and the more bold she gets, the larger she grows. It is a circuitous logic in which her size contributes to her impudence as her impudence contributes to her size. She grows so large “that she [isn’t] a bit afraid of interrupting [the King]” (106). That Alice is more powerful than the sovereigns, both King and Queen, is symbolized by her size. Yet her size is not just a symbol, it actually makes her more bold. Therefore, Alice’s power and gender combine to wreak havoc on the social institution of justice and to place Alice higher in the social order than the King and Queen.

Becoming a Queen is Alice’s goal throughout *Through the Looking Glass*. When she starts the chess game which orders the entire book, she settles for being a pawn but
admits that she “should like to be a Queen, best” (141). The Red Queen tells Alice that she may easily become a Queen by reaching the eighth square, and Alice journeys throughout the novel to make it there. Once she is Queen, it seems that she does not have to worry about being part of the Red King’s dream any longer, instead she must endeavor to wrest power away from the two already existing queens. In her first examination by the queens, Alice finds that they still have power over her while they pepper her with questions. Alice cannot seem to answer correctly, so she must come up with a plan to confuse the queens so that they stop asking the questions. When the Red Queen asks Alice to translate fiddle-dee-dee into French, Alice says that “fiddle-dee-dee’s not English.” The Red Queen does not disagree, but insists that Alice translate it into French. The newly queened Alice, however, has learned a bit of deviousness, just like the other two queens have. “Alice [thinks] she [sees] a way out of the difficulty” and says that she will perform the translation if the Red Queen will tell her the origin of language of fiddle-dee-dee (223). This of course ends this line of enquiry, and Alice bests the queen. Laura White argues that this instance shows that the “White and Red Queens hold no more authority than that of a governess, and Alice’s hard-won crown does not bring her the power to control adequately even one dinner party,” but I would argue that the Red Queen and Alice continue to compete for power, even if that power is only domestic (119). When the Red Queen orders the pudding to be taken away, “Alice [doesn’t] see why the Red Queen should be the only one to give orders” and tells the waiter to bring the pudding back (230). Alice finds that her orders are just as powerful as the Red Queen’s and the pudding reappears “like a conjuring trick” (230). This is yet another
instance of sudden appearance and disappearance which populates the novel. Alice now has the power to make others appear and disappear at will, once again tying visual experience to power. Alice’s deviousness and disregard for the Red Queen, the previous sovereign, all make her seem more like a femme fatale than a Ruskinian Queen. Her power is as frightening in the Looking Glass world as it is in the courtroom in Wonderland. Rather than integrating herself into the social order, which in the Looking Glass world seems to be chaos, she instead disrupts everything. Alice “jump[s] up and seize[s] the tablecloth” sending “plates, dishes, guests, and candles” crashing into a “heap on the floor” (234). Once again, Alice’s power threatens the social order in the dream world.

However, as powerful as Alice becomes, both books immediately recontain Alice as soon as she begins to destroy the prevailing social order. Even her final act of power and disruption, the pulling down of the tablecloth, is ultimately one which amounts to no more than a domestic disturbance. Throughout the book the world is domestic and not political, so Alice, and the reader, should not be surprised when Alice gains no political power from her Queenship (White 122). At the banquet in the Looking Glass world, Alice picks up the Red Queen and physically begins to shake her, a moment in which Alice could be showcasing her great political power. Just as Alice begins to show her mastery over the competing sovereign in the book, that sovereign actually becomes a kitten. Alice is reduced to a little girl, once again, and she is only playing with her kittens rather than presiding as Queen over a feast. Alice also returns to the question of whose dream it was. She asks Kitty to help her address the “very serious question” and reasons:
“[the Red King] was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too!” (239-40). Identifying the dreamer who is creating the Looking Glass World is important to Alice throughout the book because she wants to be the one who has the power to make meaning and create the dream worlds. She does not want to be part of someone else’s creation. Here, however, she gives the power of interpretation and meaning to the kitten, rendering the kitten more powerful than herself. She pleads with the kitten asking: “Was it the Red King, Kitty? You were his wife, my dear, so you ought to know” (240). This immediately places Kitty into the position of the Red Queen, who Alice is sure the kitten became in the dream, and forfeits the power of interpretation back to the Red Queen, from whom Alice worked so hard to wrest power in the last scene of the dream. Not only has Alice been reduced to the little powerless girl that she is, she seems to accept this powerlessness and to return to the innocuous position of the ingénue.

While Alice forfeits the power of creation to a kitten in *Through the Looking Glass*, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* she forfeits it to her sister. The novel ends with the narrator describing Alice’s older sister’s musing about who the little girl will become. She pictures her first as the little girl, then as the little girl within the dreamy Wonderland, then “Lastly she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman” (110). This grown-up Alice is not pictured as a strong, powerful woman, but instead in the projection “she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood” (110). By allowing Alice’s sister to make meaning of Alice, and to finally interpret her dream, the narrator contains Alice’s power wholly within the dream world. Even as a grown woman, Alice will be
childlike and innocent. Her powers of interpretation and meaning making are once again contained by her sister, and the narrator, when they reduce her to be forever a childlike ingénue who cannot possibly understand her world as an adult would. These two reductions of the powerful Alice back to an innocent child only “playing” in her dream worlds contrasts to the goal for which Alice strives in both novels: to become Queen, or at least as powerful as a Queen in Wonderland. While her journey into a garden in Wonderland and through a Garden in the Looking Glass seem to encourage her to achieve these goals, “implicit in both these texts is the lack of real power for women that such a place affords” (Pierce 742). The lack of response to the Queen of Heart’s orders for beheadings, the ineffectual questions of the Red Queen, and the disarray of the White Queen should have suggested this to Alice through each of the novels. The dissolution of Alice’s power at the end of both books completes the fantasy that Carroll creates throughout. As Alice becomes powerful and conspicuous, the reader “sees” her grow. Yet, Carroll assures us that Alice is still just a little girl; she has no power and will remain a childlike figure all of her life. And, just as the Lady of Shalott would be re-rendered many times by various artists, Alice will also remain the child in the books as she is endlessly re-imagined.
Chapter 4: A Thousand People Looking: Subjectivity and Late Nineteenth-Century Technologies of Image-Making

She took her off the table as she spoke, and shook her backwards and forwards with all her might.

The Red Queen made no resistance whatever: only her face grew very small, and her eyes got large and green: and still, as Alice went on shaking her, she kept on growing shorter—and fatter—and softer—and rounder—and—

it really was a kitten, after all. (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* 235-36)

It is common to find an object in one of the twin [stereoscopic] pictures which we miss in the other; the person or the vehicle having moved in the interval of taking the two photographs… In the lovely glass stereograph of the Lake of Brienz, on the left-hand side, a vaguely hinted female figure stands by the margin of the fair water; on the other side of the picture she is not seen. This is life; we seem to see her come and go. All the longings, passions, experiences, possibilities, of womanhood animate that gliding shadow which has flitted through our consciousness, nameless, dateless, featureless, yet more profoundly real than the sharpest of portraits traced by a human hand.

(Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs* 24)
The scene that ends Alice’s adventure in Looking Glass-land would have been optically familiar to contemporary readers. The scene resembles the kind of dissolve that took place in magic lantern viewing. When one transparent slide was changed for another, one image, projected through the use of lenses and light, would dissolve into the next. At the end of the novel, the Red Queen is slowly transforming into Alice’s kitten. The transformation is a significant one in *Through the Looking Glass*. It is similar to other transformations Alice witnesses, where images change before her eyes, but it is different in that it is not sudden. The Red Queen “grows” shorter, and fatter, and smaller, until she has become a kitten. By the time Carroll was writing, the magic lantern had been around for over two-hundred years.\(^{41}\) The scene can be read as a transition in a magic lantern show, and the story as a whole could be read as a narrative slideshow. When slides are changed, the White Queen turns into a goat, the scenery changes from a forest to the interior of a train carriage, the reeds in a pond turn into the shelves in a shop, and an ordinary egg turns into Humpty Dumpty. Carroll may not have been intentionally alluding to the magic lantern when he was writing the tale of Alice’s escapade in the mirror world. However, he certainly would have been familiar with the magic lantern and may have derived inspiration from the changeability of the visual world that particular optical instrument expounded.

The other passage refers to the stereoscope, a much more recently developed optical technology in the mid-nineteenth century. Sir Charles Wheatstone first described the “Phenomena of Binocular Vision” to the Royal Society in 1838. His lecture outlined

\(^{41}\) Richard Altick notes that Samuel Pepy records his experience with a magic lantern as early as 1666 (117).
the way that human three-dimensional vision is composed from the two slightly different pictures transmitted to the brain from their respective eyes. Wheatstone’s lecture centers around the explanation of a method for reproducing this three-dimensional vision. Two pictures of an object, one from the perspective of the right eye and the other from that of the left eye, when viewed in an instrument which allows each eye to see only its respective picture, reproduces the “solidity,” or dimension, of the object (373). This instrument was called the stereoscope. Wheatstone’s lecture occurred just one year prior to Daguerre’s public demonstration of the daguerrotype, and the mechanical processes for capturing pictures would do much to improve the uses of the stereoscope. Oliver Wendell Holmes was writing his account many years after the these two instruments’ were first introduced to the public, a time when instantaneous photography and the dry plate process had already been perfected. His description of the shadowy woman is what might loosely be termed a double exposure. While the double exposure generally refers to the same film being exposed twice, and therefore creating a faint image layered upon a more dominant one, this double exposure is a product of the change in scenery which has taken place in the time that it has taken to move the camera from the left eye position to the right eye position. The two pictures are different, and they are being seen by two different eyes, but they are being interpreted by one brain, and hence, both are perceived at once.

Holmes’ description of the stereograph, or stereoscopic photograph, echoes the other nineteenth-century literary representations of visual technologies already discussed. The woman in the stereograph has the same haunting absence/presence that Alice
experiences when she first enters the Looking Glass-land and The Lady of Shalott experiences in the land of Camelot. While Alice has the ability to effect the physical world around her without being seen or heard, and the Lady’s voice is heard as she remains invisible to the world, this nameless woman in the stereograph has, in some ways, a more embodied experience and in some ways a much less embodied experience than her counterparts due to the technology of the photograph. The photograph and the woman’s body have a direct relationship with each other; they occupied the same time and space when the image was captured. Yet, it is the woman’s body that is erased, or made a “shadow,” when it is made a picture by this direct relationship. The image is an indexical rendering of a person who existed and walked near the lake. While she is not a fiction, the captured image and the story told about it could be considered a fictionalized rendering of a reality. This is the visual equivalent of Alice, a “real” little girl made fiction by the story told about her. She becomes the vessel of the reader’s/viewer’s experience. The “longings, passions, experiences, possibilities, of womanhood” are captured by the visual technology, but are never fully realized. These are not her feelings, but the projection of the writer’s. There are two processes which both work to separate the woman from her bodily experience. First, the photomechanical process reduces her to an imprint of light upon a photographic plate. Then, when this photograph is used as half of a stereograph, the viewer participates in further removing the woman from her bodily experience through the process of perception. The viewer sees both photographs simultaneously. Instead of interpreting this vision as one photograph with a woman present and one with the woman absent, the viewer perceives a faint “gliding
shadow” of her within one unified picture. The woman in the photograph is no longer a specific woman; she is “nameless, dateless, featureless” because she has been separated from her individuality by this one moment being caught in the technology of the photograph. The stereoscopic picture functions much as the mirror does for the Lady and the Wood with No Name does for Alice; it separates her from her very self. In all three, men tell the stories that mythologize the female figures, and divest them of their individuality. Instead of people, they become mere stories, mere projections of selves. The stereoscope and early motion picture exerted control over vision and over multiple visual possibilities. As they removed the human body from the images produced, they privileged visual experience over aural and physical experience. In so doing, the image was removed from the subject, and the process of scrutiny was formalized. Cinematic visuality encroached on the concept of a lived reality by allowing sequences of time to be created through editing and relived endlessly. In this environment, the envisioning of the female body became a model for the threat that motion pictures and visual technologies posed to individuality and to the human experience of life. This contributed to the creation of the modern subject.

Ironically, the stereograph, which made the woman at the Lake of Brienz a mere shadow, purportedly represented the “solid” world. Wheatstone suggests that if, “two perspective projections of the same solid object” are projected to the two eyes, “the mind will still perceive the object to be single, but instead of a representation on a plane surface, as each drawing appears to be when separately viewed by that eye which is directed towards it, the observer will perceive a figure of three dimensions” (373-74).
this passage it is clear that three-dimensional is synonymous with “solid.” Solidity and dimension convey the physical world to the viewer. Whereas discussions of light, mirrors, and lenses often removed any physiognomical account of sight from the field of optics, the stereoscope relies on the human body in order to describe the perception of the physical world.\textsuperscript{42} The explanation of binocular vision argues that human perception of dimensional objects is reliant on the distance between the two eyes on the human face. The stereoscope also demonstrated that the human perception of “real objects” in the physical world could be manufactured as “there should be… no difference in the binocular appearance of two drawings, one presented to each eye, and of two real objects so presented to the two eyes that their projections on the retina [should] be the same as those arising from the drawings” (Wheatstone 378). The “real objects” here can easily be confused with drawings, and Wheatstone calls his device the “stereoscope, to indicate its property of representing solid figures” (374). This device was so powerful that mere drawings could be confused with solid objects, thereby confusing the physical world with the world of representation. Wheatstone gives many examples, and even provides a sheet of illustrations which could be used in home stereoscopes, of images suitable for such viewing. Cubes, lines, cones, and dots were mere elementary drawings which could be given dimension and solidity through proper projection.

The stereoscope participates in the same philosophies of sight as the earlier debates about the nature of light and the concept of the virtual focus. Early in the

\textsuperscript{42} It should not be assumed that mathematics was removed from Wheatstone’s explorations of optics. His device and his theory relied heavily on it, and he states that “the process by which we thus become acquainted with the real forms of solid objects, is precisely that which is employed in descriptive geometry” (377).
century, the wave theory of light upset the connection between sight and the physical world. The wave theory required the viewer to interpret sight. Rather than sight being intrinsically connected to the physical world, as in particle theory, sight became understood as one’s interpretation of light rays as they reflected off of objects. In theories of the virtual focus the relationship between light and the physical world became even more disconnected. In the virtual focus, light rays converge, or appear to converge, through reflection and refraction in order to produce for the viewer a visual impression which may not physically exist. Like the virtual focus, the stereoscope produces the illusion of a solid world which does not exist outside the viewer’s perception. While simple drawings could be used, stereoscopic photographs used light to create solid impressions of complex pictures, such as landscape, to make an even more complete illusion. The spectacle of the stereoscope was generally the illusion of solidity, yet the ghostlike appearance of figures captured in only one side of the stereograph has the power to make figures less solid. This too is an illusion. The stereograph Holmes describes has removed the dimension and solidity from the woman at the lake because it represents her as both existing and not existing simultaneously. Rather than rendering her more solid, the stereograph makes her a mere “shadow” because she is seen in only one of the images. She is a mere ghost. The metaphor for visual philosophy is striking. When read alongside the Alice texts, “The Lady of Shalott,” and other works of fiction which use metaphors of sight to describe women’s subjectivity, such as Middlemarch and Far From the Madding Crowd, it seems that this visual philosophy became important in figuring women’s identity. These texts all question whether women can ever be
considered solid, or are instead amorphous meetings of rays of light which could trick perception into believing that they exist in ways they do not. So while the stereoscope required the reinfusion of the human body into optics via the position of the eyes on the face, it also had the ability to remove the humanity from those captured by the image. The human body became necessary for the perceiver, but was removed from the subject being viewed. The person being viewed became a receptacle for the viewer’s impressions rather than a solid being.

This alludes to the anxieties surrounding early photography: the fear that one would no longer have control over the self. Here, the nameless woman has, presumably, not given consent for her image to be used in the stereograph. She is not given control over her image, the reproduction of her image, or the sale of her image. She has no control over how she is perceived, and is rendered a shadowy ghost by the stereoscopic technology. This lack of control was a legitimate fear for those who were first using the photographic camera. In 1855, Cuthbert Bede quoted a camera “operator” who remarked that:

When beebles do come for vaat you call bortraits, dey most not dink dey are in de leetle rum by demself, bot dey most dink dat all de world look at dem! Dat dey are having deir bortraits bainted before a crowd, oh! so vast! dat dey are on the stage of de theatre, wid den dousand beebles all a looking at dem, and not shut up here in de leetle rum, by demself. (38)

Although Bede’s reproduction of the cameraman’s German accent is comical, the warning is serious. Through the cameraman’s words, Bede is warning that, once a
photograph has been taken, it can be seen by anyone in the world and can be reproduced endlessly. Therefore, the photograph should always be considered a public entity. This renders the portrait paradoxical. The portrait is highly personal, capturing an individual in attitudes which provide some contextualization for his/her personality and position in life. Yet, here, if the “whole world” is looking at the individual, then the portrait must be an object that enables public scrutiny.

Early photographs required the subject to sit still for a long exposure. In these types of photographs, where the subject of the portrait was required to place his head in a vise in order to remain still, the subject would surely know that he was being photographed. While the subject may not have had control over his image, or even his body as he sat with his head in a vise, he at least knew that he was being photographed. This changed as the exposure time of photography became faster. In 1851 R. L. Maddox, an English physician, developed a photographic plate that cut exposure time to one-one-hundredth of a second and allowed a picture to be taken of an object in motion, capturing one instant in the movement (Ceram 77). This allowed greater mobility of photography, greater licence to photographers, and consequently, less control to the subject. This allowed for the kind of photographs that made the stereograph which Holmes is describing. The woman was walking through the frame, and was caught in the scenery in one picture, but not in the other. Her shadowy figure and her lack of identification show that photography had the ability to capture her image without capturing her individuality. Instead of a specific woman with a name, a psyche, a life, a family, etc. the woman
becomes an empty receptacle in which the viewer can deposit all of his assumptions about her.

Yet this visual technology which has removed her from her solidity has also rendered her “more profoundly real than the sharpest of portraits traced by a human hand” for the very reason that the picture has caught the transitory nature of life. People are beginning to “come and go” with miraculous speed during the Victorian era. Wolfgang Schivelbisch notes that railway travel changed the way that people perceived their world by collapsing time and space. In his argument, duration is “not an objective mathematical unit, but a subjective perception of space-time” (36). I would argue that the photographic camera performed a similar function. The camera changed the way that people understood their world. It lessened the value of bodily experience and privileged the visual experience instead. Stereoscopic photography was especially noted for its authenticity of experience. Archibald McCullagh states that stereographs, “are the best substitute for an actual visit to those lands” which one could not visit, William Elder claims that “they afford the only means by which the many who can not travel may gain a real acquaintance with other lands and people,” and J. Irving Manatt states that “they are a marvel of realism” (qtd. in Holmes 71-72). These accounts all propose that visual experience is a valid substitute for bodily experience.

Not only did the stereoscope obliterate the relationship between the physical world and sight, much as the theories of light and the virtual focus did, but it also made

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43 The authenticity experienced when viewing stereographs did not disappear in the nineteenth century. In 1957 Harold Jenkins claimed that “in viewing these old stereo cards, one feels that he is living again in the days of long ago. A street scene shows people in the dress of the day standing out as though alive” (2).
the connection between the physical world and what was considered “real” more tenuous. For all the “realism” the stereoscopic photographs captured in the detail of the dimensional image, they also required the viewer to remember that the pictures were moments held in time. The woman in one side of the picture, but absent in the other, illustrates that the scene is constantly changing, and that one moment’s view may not be enough. What has often gone unnoticed in the stereoscope is that it helped to destroy the idea of a stable world because it captured this temporality. Early photographic stereographs were created before the dual-lens stereographic camera was invented by Sir David Brewster in 1848 (Ceram 112). As Holmes notes, it is not unusual to see images in one side of the stereoscopic image which do not appear in the other because they have moved in the time it has taken to reposition the camera. Yet, Holmes argues that “this is life” (24). This capturing of the transitory nature of life showed that every moment of life is a different experience with a different lived “reality.” Experience, even if only reproduced visually, of this ever-changing world was “more real” than any single frozen moment. In the nineteenth century, the stereoscope contributed to an understanding of the world defined by a visual philosophy that dictates that the physical world at any one moment is no more or less real than a visual impression which has no exact physical analogue.

This ethos is captured in H.P. Robinson’s criticism of instantaneous photography. In *Picture-Making and Photography*, written in 1889, he complains that “a photograph of moving objects, taken in less than a fraction of a second [through instantaneous photography]… may represent a scientific fact, but is not true to nature as we see it, for it
represents that which the eye has never seen, nor will ever see” (125). This complaint of Robinson’s is illustrative of Noël Burch’s theory of the creation of the Institutional Mode of Representation. In *Life to Those Shadows*, Burch argues that existing nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology of representation felt that photography and motion picture, which were used to examine scientific principles, lacked aesthetic and naturalistic qualities. Early photography sought to fill these voids by making the images captured resemble the theater, the novel, and painting, thereby constructing what would become the Institutional Mode of Representation (1-22). Robinson’s comment illustrates the ideology which Burch identifies as bourgeois which finds photographs that capture scientific fact a challenge to human perception.

Robinson’s critique is also an interesting foreshadowing of what Christian Metz would later call the “imaginary signifier” in cinema. Metz describes the cinema as participating in the imaginary in two ways: it participates with the ordinary imaginary in that “most films consist of fictional narratives and because all films depend even for their signifier on the primary imaginary of photography and phonography,” and it participates in the Lacanian imaginary order because the cinema screen is the “other mirror” where people create images of themselves (3-4). So, by imaginary Metz refers to both the images that make up cinema and the fictive quality of cinema. The cinematic signifier does not refer to a signified, or a referent. The images on the screen never existed in the quality in which they are portrayed.\footnote{Arguably, in this construction, novels and poetry which signify a fictional referent could also be considered “imaginary signifiers,” except that they are not made up of images, because the words in these texts do not refer to an event in the physical world.} Instead, the images have been manipulated through
editing and shot construction. Therefore, the cinematic signifier is the imaginary signifier which has no relationship with a physical world (40). Metz’s concept of the imaginary signifier is very similar to Robinson’s complaints. However, Robinson argues that the scientific explanation of any phenomenon does not make the human experience of it any less valuable. In his point-of-view, there is a problem with “photographs, taken under conditions which represent nature as we never see it (very interesting, no doubt, from a scientific point-of-view), held up as models of truth, as convincing evidence that artists of all ages… knew nothing of the nature which it is the object of the artist’s life to study” (126). Robinson makes the case that human visual experience is just as “true” as scientific renderings of the visual world. The woman in the stereograph illustrates an early trick of editing, but she also represents the “com[ing] and go[ing]” of life. From an editing standpoint, she is absent in one side of the photograph but present in the other. Both pictures are perceived at the same time, but this perception has no real-life analogue. She was not present to the left eye and absent to the right eye when viewed by people. The same “play of presence-absence” which Metz insists is “important to study” is present here in this stereograph which predates cinema (40). From a humanistic standpoint, this stereograph conveys the “feeling’ of the picture” that Robinson privileges; it imparts the experience of life (122). The woman is present, then absent. Therefore, the image has the same quality as the cinematic imaginary signifier while it fights the problem of the moment captured by the instantaneous photograph.

Perhaps a better term for them would be “fictive signifiers.” Novels where illustrations are just as important as the text, such as Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* or Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, muddy Metz’s assumption that the imaginary signifier is a unique feature of cinema.
The stereograph, then, illustrates the destruction of the connection between sight and the physical world while it showcases the transitory nature of life. While images are solid, they are also ghostly, while they are “real” they are also fictive. These philosophies of sight, along with the pioneering spirit of nineteenth-century philosophers and inventors, created the conditions which were necessary for the production of film.

The precise “history” of motion picture technology is different in every text. Those histories produced in the United States tend to privilege Edison’s inventions; others produced in Britain tend to privilege German, French, and British inventors. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts enumerate many rudimentary philosophical toys, such as the thaumatrope, which help to elucidate persistence of vision; most contemporary accounts of film history discredit those illustrations which do not show bodies in continual motion. For the purposes of this study, the specific technological history is not as important as the philosophies of vision, as illustrated by various key photographic inventions, are. The stereoscope and the animated photograph are derived from the same ethos surrounding vision in the nineteenth century. Motion picture captures the changing world visually and removes the necessity for this vision to have any connection to a physical world analogue while paradoxically “revealing” scientific truth about that physical world.

Phenakistoscopes, stroboscopes, zootropes (or zoëtropes), and praxinoscopes all have one short motion captured and looped back onto itself in order to create an endless, monotonous moving image. Phenakistoscopes and stroboscopes both utilize a wheel with successive images on the outside, spun around an axis, and seen through a viewfinder.
The zoëtrope utilizes the same looped picture, but places it in a cylindrical barrel with viewing slits at the top. The praxinoscope uses mirrors in the middle of the spinning barrel to reflect images to the viewer (fig. 4.1), thereby eliminating the distance between the viewer and the image which is necessitated by the circumference of the barrel in the zoëtrope. The zoëtrope could also be turned on its side, so that the barrel is turning end over end. There was much experimentation with this, as stereoscopic images could then be shown as a “method of attaining the simultaneous perception of solidity and motion,” but they were soon abandoned (Hopwood 41). Mutoscopes and filoscopes have the capability of much longer sequences of motion, but do not duplicate dimension. The mutoscope utilizes a series of photographs that successively flip when a handle is turned. They are seen by a single viewer through a window, or viewfinder. The mutoscope, like the phenakistoscope, stroboscope, zoëtrope, and praxinoscope, requires the picture to begin in an attitude very similar to the ending attitude so that motion never ends (fig. 4.2). The filoscope uses similar technology as the mutoscope. It is a handheld device in

Figure 4.1
which many photographs are flipped past an opening for the viewer to see. It differs in that its image is not endless. When a viewer has completed the book of images, the motion stops and the viewer must reset the book (Ceram 136-140, Hopwood 10-40). These animated image technologies have several things in common. They all necessitate individual viewing and they all utilize images printed on opaque materials in order to be clear. While light is necessary for seeing these images, it is not an integral part of the image. The technology of the kinetoscope utilized light and translucent celluloid images in order to recreate movement (fig. 4.3). In the kinetoscope, the viewer looks through a viewfinder to see a series of images, printed on translucent celluloid film, as they are moved past a single light source (Ceram 136). The images are illuminated from behind by this light source, and therefore the translucency of the film is required. Kinetoscopic films still only allow for individual viewing, but they utilize light as part of the apparatus.

Projected film also utilizes light as part of the apparatus. A strong light source was necessary for projecting the images on the translucent celluloid film strip onto a screen a distance from the film. Rather than light projecting an image onto an eye, strong
light source and translucency combined to project an image for an audience. This fundamentally changes the ethos of the animated photograph. In other forms, viewing the animated images was an individual pursuit. The experience, even when executed in a mutoscope parlour or in a kinetoscope with multiple viewfinders, gave the illusion that the viewer was privately examining the moving image. The viewfinder, which used cupped blinders to eliminate outside light, and the very fact that the image was contained within the device, created an isolated viewer and an external image. In these devices, the underlying idea behind the scrutinizing gaze is that someone may peek into a restricted area and see an image of life. The projected film created the cinematic audience. No longer was the viewer a peeping tom, but instead the viewer was everyone. The theatrical structure of projected film creates the idea that the populace at large is always scrutinizing the world. In the cinematic imagination, we are all scrutinizers and we are all scrutinized.
It is interesting that stereoscopic motion photography, while experimented with heavily between 1852-1860, was so readily abandoned. One explanation for this, and for the abandonment of the other motion picture technologies discussed, is the commercial value of the projected motion picture. All instruments which require individual viewing through an eyepiece limit the money that can be made at any one time. A mutoscope parlour, for example, might have fourteen machines, but a theater of the same size might hold fifty people. Yet, in the theater there is not the high turnover one might see in a mutoscope parlour, and the operator could not charge per film viewed as in the parlour.\textsuperscript{45}

It is also possible that the stereoscopic motion picture did not satisfy an ideological need of image-making at the time of its production. As Noël Burch argues, early motion pictures utilized technologies to supply the third dimension, sync sound, and color to the images, yet these were abandoned because they did not conform to ideologies which insisted on an aesthetics based in earlier nineteenth-century art forms (28-41). Stereoscopic technology itself may not have had as lasting a commercial value as the motion picture did, but its contribution to the environment of motion pictures is found in the earliest stereographs which portray change, supporting Burch’s argument. The transparency of the woman in “The Lake of Brienz” stereograph creates the impression that movement and translucency are united. The stereoscope has captured the passage of time, just as the cinema would later do, and the passage of time is rendered visible by a “vaguely hinted female figure” (Holmes 24). The translucent film and the scrutiny of the audience became other ways through which to imagine women’s subjectivity.

\textsuperscript{45} Whether the boom of early motion picture theaters was a product of visual philosophy or political economy, it contributed to ideas about sight which pervaded the culture.
It is not surprising, then, that the earliest studies of motion utilize nude, or nearly nude women. Just as Noël Burch argues that the Institutional Mode of Representation for photography and cinema was “no more neutral that it [was] ahistorical,” but rather that it was born from existing nineteenth-century ideologies, so too were the ways that women were represented in these media (3). For example, Muybridge’s examination of a female dancer, projected at the Chicago Fair in 1893, shows a woman dancing in a gauzy dress so transparent that her pubic hair and breasts are clearly visible. In his *Human Figure in Motion* (1901), a fully nude model picks up a jug and walks up a flight of stairs. In both of these studies of motion, the models’ bodies are clearly visible. This is in direct contrast of his studies of men. His examination of a male athlete, also shown at the Chicago Fair in 1893, shows only the silhouette of a man jumping. His face and body are so dark they are simply shadows, but it is clear that he is at least wearing pants in one frame of the plates. These early studies of motion, Carroll’s Alice books, and Holmes’ writing about the steroscope show that the ideological work of deconstructing the female figure to disallow for individual subjectivity was part of the fabric of nineteenth-century visual philosophy.

The relationship between the cinema and earlier forms of entertainment has not gone unnoticed. Ian Christie claims that early films shown at fairs are “entirely consistent with half a century of Magic Lantern shows and increasingly realistic theatre spectacles” (17). Christian Metz argues that:

Since its birth at the end of the nineteenth century the cinema has, as it were, been snapped up by the Western, Aristotelian tradition of the fictional and
representational arts, of *diegesis* and *mimesis*, for which its spectators were prepared—prepared in spirit, but also instinctually—by their experience of the novel, of theatre, of figurative painting, and which was thus the most profitable tradition for the cinema industry. (39)

Sergei Eisenstein notes that “From Dickens, from the Victorian novel, stem the first shots of American film esthetic, forever linked with the name of David Wark Griffith” (195). He cites content, such as the city/country divide, as well as editing techniques, such as parallel action and the dissolve, as having been derived from Dickens novels. Rather than creating a new image-driven vocabulary, cinema was derived from earlier modes of narrative and spectacle with which nineteenth-century audiences would have been familiar.

Women’s representation in these earlier forms of narrative and spectacle also contributed to cinematic language. The examination of women’s depiction in other nineteenth-century media shows that early cinematic representation participated in earlier visual motifs which served to figure women’s identity as unstable and, to borrow from Metz and Lacan, “imaginary,” image-based and fictive. Contemporary literature imagined possibilities for capturing the woman’s body in cinema. Jules Vern’s novel *The Carpathian Castle*, first published in 1893, is about an opera singer who dies very young. Her image and voice are captured by a mysterious machine and are endlessly projected by a man who admired her during her life. Rudyard Kipling’s “Mrs. Bathurst,” first published in 1904, outlines a tale of a man who becomes obsessed with seeing a former lover in a motion picture which is being shown in a travelling circus’s motion picture
tent. He eventually leaves his military post, and his charred body is found next to a railway. Another, unidentified body accompanies his, but the implication is that it is Mrs. Bathurst herself. In both of these stories, the woman is reduced to an image which can be captured and repeatedly enjoyed. Women’s bodies are illusions of light and projection, and their histories bear resemblance to the passage of time, but this passage is stagnant as it is replayed a multitude of times. Life is removed from the women when they are rendered as images. Although animated photography eliminated the third dimension of space, it took its cue from early stereoscopy and these works of literature. It added the fourth dimension of time and it created imaginary bodies. This new type of photography was not solid as paper negatives were, nor was it stable as glass plate photography was. Celluloid film was transparent, allowing light to be projected through it. It was transitory, allowing the picture on the screen to change rapidly. Not only did it offer another venue through which to imagine women’s subjectivity, it was itself a metaphor for that identity.

The earliest filmic adaptation of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* shows how early motion pictures participated in an existing visual culture which figured women as constantly changing images. In 1903, Cecil B. Hepworth produced *Alice in Wonderland*. At over 800 feet, it was the longest film ever made in England at the time and had a running time of about twelve minutes (Brown). The film’s participation in the culture of image production is evident in its production as an animated photograph, and in its fidelity to John Tenniel’s original illustrations of Carroll’s book. Simon Brown notes that “Hepworth was insistent that the images stay faithful to the drawings of Sir John
Tenniel.” Arguably, the first translation, or adaptation, of Carroll’s narrative into image was this set of illustrations which Tenniel created to accompany the text. He created images for key moments in the book which were of particular visual interest. Often times these images accompany moments of bodily change for Alice. The fidelity to these illustrations, which Brown notes, is clear in several of the scenes of the early film. For example, the scene where Alice grows large and gets stuck in the White Rabbit’s tiny house is very similar to Tenniel’s illustration. In the opening shot of the scene in the motion picture Alice is in a very similar attitude as she is in Tenniel’s drawing. She is laying on one side, with her feet near the fireplace and her arm hanging out the window.

It is tempting to argue that the motion picture is an adaptation of the illustrations rather than of the narrative because so many of the illustrated images correspond to the tableau that greet the audience at the beginning of scenes. However, this could not be accurate. Tenniel’s illustrations which accompany moments of physical change in the story are static, therefore, they represent either the moment before the change or the moment directly following. Carroll’s narrative is where the dynamic nature of the text is found, and is where Hepworth derives his understanding of Alice’s changing imaginary body. Tenniel cannot represent the moments of the change, except through a succession of pictures. The moments caught in Hepworth’s film which represent moments of change show the change while it is taking place. For example, the scene marked by the intertitle “Alice dreams that she sees the white rabbit and follows him down the rabbit hole into the hall of many doors,” corresponds to the moment in the text when Alice first learns that her physical body is capricious. In the book, Alice peers through a small door to see
a garden on the other side. She would like to get into the garden, but finds her body is too large. A bottle with a tag demanding, “drink me” suddenly appears, and when Alice complies, she shrinks to a size which would allow her to get through the door, but finds that she has left the key to the door on a table which is far too high for her to reach now that she is so small. Then she finds a box suddenly with a cake which says “eat me,” and consuming this cake makes her large enough to reach the key, but far too large to fit through the door. As she cries at her misfortune, she fans herself with the White Rabbit’s fan, which causes her to become very small again (Carroll 312-20).

The changing of Alice’s body in this episode is duplicated in the scene. While Tenniel’s illustrations only show the cause or result of Alice’s transformation, for example one shows Alice holding the bottle marked “drink me” and the other shows Alice very large in the small room, Hepworth shows the change as it takes place. This is accomplished by superimposing shots of Alice, with the camera either tracking in to show her as growing larger or tracking out to show her as growing smaller, over shots of the background. That is one of the attractions of the motion picture medium, it can show change and development over time. Ironically, Hepworth uses a series of images to show Alice in her moments of change, just at Tenniel did, yet the series is shown in such quick succession that the audience perceives them as one animated photograph. In this early film adaptation it is evident that filmic language was not created in a vacuum. Terri Gillian states that “when you look at the very first films, you can actually see people discovering a brand-new language—reveling in the power of a close-up, a cut or a dissolve” (3). The Alice books, Holmes’ writing about the steroscope, and Hepworth’s
adaptation of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* seem to discredit the idea of a “brand-new language” being invented with cinema. Instead, the power of close-ups, cuts, dissolves, and double exposures were all derived from earlier story-telling and image-making techniques. Hepworth is often noted as the first to use editing with a purpose in creating a narrative in “Rescued by Rover” (1905). However, in this film it is evident that Hepworth was innovative in his use of the camera, film, and editing, but that the ideas for the change were derived from Carroll’s narrative. Furthermore, the editing techniques used to showcase Alice’s capricious body also emphasize the female subject as both “image” and as constantly mutating.

The ceaseless fluctuations of Alice’s body as portrayed by the editing techniques and the cinematic apparatus draw attention to the divide between the physical and visual worlds and echo the absence/presence that Alice experiences in *Through the Looking Glass*. The editing creates a fantastic visual experience for the audience. They know that the actress on the screen did not undergo the drastic changes that the audience is witnessing. Therefore, the changing body on the screen is indicating to the audience that it is an image and not a physical body. This is much more dramatic than illustrations which represent the same changes because the woman on the screen does have a physical body which exists in some time and space. The illustrations Tenniel provides are engravings from pen and ink. The subjects of the images never existed in the time and space of the physical world. The screen images participate in the absence/presence paradox in which women in nineteenth-century visual culture often seem to participate. In one sense, the audience must acknowledge that the person on the screen is a “real-life”
person, but she does not occupy the space, at the front of the theater, in which she appears. Instead, very much like the virtual focus, Mary Clark, the actress who plays Alice, appears only because projected light is focused at a point on a screen which makes images which do not exist in the physical world appear to an audience. Mary Clark is made fictive both because she is embodying a fictional persona, like an actress on the stage would do, and because she is reduced to a conglomerate of light rays. Much like the lady in “The Lake of Brienz” stereograph is made fictional by the photomechanical process, the woman on the screen is an indexical rendering of Mary Clark, removed from the time and place of the acting.\(^{46}\) The actress is made a fiction by Hepworth’s direction of the camera. This, of course, is layered upon the already fictive quality of Alice. At one point, Lewis Carroll was telling the story using the identity of a specific little girl, Alice Liddell. Alice is separated from herself by his narration which mythologizes her and imagines an inner psychological life for her. She is further separated from the “self” when another man, one whom there is no evidence that she ever knew, appropriated the story and “cast” another woman to “play” her.\(^{47}\) The very terms used to describe the cinematic process figure Alice’s subjectivity as a toy that interchangeable women may appropriate. Mary Clark as Alice is once again separated from her self by the separation of the woman on screen from any bodily experience. Alice is made a fictional character,

\(^{46}\) This also echoes Metz’s discussion of the imaginary nature of cinema because the audience and the items on the screen never occupy the same time and space.

\(^{47}\) And this isn’t the first time. There were many stage renditions of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, some even adapted by Lewis Carroll, which cast many different women as Alice. Another layer of separation may be added here, as Tenniel’s illustrations did not portray Alice Liddell as Carroll’s own early illustrations did, but instead made the character more fair and less sulky.
then made an interchangeable icon, then made a metamorphosing image. Alice, whoever that is, has no control over her image, or her self-hood, and the image invites public scrutiny.

The cinematic apparatus is arranged in such a way that the audience of people are required to all examine the screen, and therefore are required to examine Alice’s changing body. The editing tricks are accomplished for the audience’s visual pleasure but they also illustrate the underlying ideology of nineteenth-century visual culture; women’s subjectivity (note: plural women but singular subjectivity because the women are interchangeable) is constantly in flux and must be constantly scrutinized by the world-at-large. The familiar Alice text is not the only early film which portrays this ideology. For example, George Albert Smith’s *Mary Jane’s Mishap or Don’t Fool with Paraffin* (1903) illustrates the story of a maid who uses paraffin wax to light the kitchen fire and blows herself up. The story began as a joke about an Irish maid who does not understand that paraffin is dangerous near fire and it had been made into a film several times, by Biograph in *How Brigit Made the Fire* (1900) and by Edison in *The Finish of Brigit McKeen* (1901), by the time Smith produced his rendition of the story (*Mary Jane’s Mishap* commentary). The many reiterations of the story, along with the easily renamed and recast generic “maid,” show that the female interior subjectivity is not important to the story.\(^{48}\) Instead the story made multiple-motion picture is used to showcase the imaginary nature of the woman. When Mary Jane has caused the explosion in the fire, she ascends through the chimney and her body parts fall from the sky. Yet,

\(^{48}\) As the maid is notably “Irish” the reiterations and interchangeability of the woman also have racial implications.
even this physical destruction of the maid does not end her reiteration. In an ironic self-reflexive moment, which Smith may or may not have intended to be self-reflexive of the motion picture process, the maid’s image comes back to life. When the mistress of the house and her other maids visit the grave, Mary Jane emerges to dance a happy jig and scares them away. The ghostly appearance of Mary Jane is achieved through a double exposure, and therefore Mary Jane is a shadowy figure against a dominant background. The imagery here participates in the same visual culture as the Alice texts, “The Lady of Shalott,” and the lady in the “Lake of Brienz” stereograph. The woman is not a specific woman. Instead, she is simply a receptacle in which to deposit the audience’s and producer’s assumptions and fears. She is easily changed, in flux, unstable, and, somehow, transparent. The audience is encouraged to examine her in the frequent close-ups of her face, and see a model for the scrutinizing when the other maids come to visit her. The maids look at Mary Jane; the audience looks at the maids looking at Mary Jane. Perhaps most importantly here, the image will not die!

It seems as though Hepworth’s Alice in Wonderland and Smith’s Mary Jane’s Mishap should be analyzed in contrast to earlier actualities. These two films are narrative and fanciful. They involve sophisticated tricks of editing and photography in order to create the “cinema of attraction” Tom Gunning argues they are showcasing. Yet, Gunning argues, these early genre have much in common. When comparing the narrative films of Lumière and the non-narrative films of Méliès, he claims they are similar in their “conception that sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power… and
exoticism” (57). In Britain, too, early narrative and non-narrative films share more than they divide. However, early British films are not capitalizing on the exotic power of cinema because the visual tricks that Gunning defines as exotic are familiar to audiences. When examined alongside earlier magic lantern slideshows or Carroll’s narrative explanations of Alice’s changing body, double exposures and tracking shots which depict figures becoming ghostly or growing, seem to be adapting earlier imaginings of fantastic experience into the newest available visual medium. These films indicate the power that visual philosophy had in British culture throughout the century. This adaptation was not limited to narrative media. Early actualities, when examined alongside Hepworth’s and Smith’s narrative films, reveal similar response to and representation of the visual world of late-Victorian Britain which were incorporated into the creation of subjectivity.

For example, both Birt Acres Rough Sea at Dover (1895) and Bamforth and Sons’ Rough Sea (1900) are iconic actualities which showcase views of scenery, but upon closer examination may reveal something about the formation of the modern subject. Birt Acres’ version is widely regarded as the first of its kind. It was originally developed for use in a kinetoscope viewer, and therefore predates projected motion pictures. Animated photography was very much a novelty and certainly one of the attractions of such an exhibit would have been the spectacle of movement recreated. In fact, the popularity of this motion picture extended across the Atlantic; it was shown at Koster & Bial’s Music Hall in the U.S. for the premier of the Vitascope 23 April 1896 (Rough Sea at Dover, “Text” portion of DVD). Bamforth and Sons’ version was a capitalization on an already popular subject in an even newer technology, a projected motion picture film.
Acres’ version is made up of two shots: the first is of waves crashing along the sea wall, the other is simply a shot of water as it flows past the camera. In the film by Bamforth and Sons, the waves come rushing toward the camera. Neither has sophisticated editing, and the most elaborate mise-en-scene they utilize is camera placement. However, even these actualities can be thought of as deriving from earlier works. They are not adaptations, as one might think of Hepworth’s *Alice in Wonderland*, but they do echo some of the same themes of Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach.” While they may not have consciously been recalling the poem, they echo the same ideas, but they portray them visually rather than linguistically.

Arnold begins by observing that “the sea is calm tonight” but that “where the sea meets the moon-blanchèd land” the tumultuous nature of the ocean causes relentlessly crashing waves (1, 8). The sea that seems calm as it gleams in the moonlight is actually constantly in motion as waves “begin, and cease, and then again begin,/ with tremulous cadence slow” (12-13). The changeability of the sea to which Arnold refers is showcased in these films. The two contrasting shots in Acres’ film illustrate this paradox. In the shot of full water, although the water is moving past the camera, the sea itself looks like it is calmly flowing. It is only when this shot is contrasted to the other that it becomes clear that the sea is quite violent. The contrast of the sea to the wall is necessary for the power of the movement to be clearly felt. Rachael Low and Roger Manvell argue that “an actuality results from placing the camera in front of objects that provide movement” and that “the interest arises merely from the curiousity of seeing familiar sights reproduced on screen” (44). In this evaluation, the entire interest of the film is simply the movement of
the sea. Arnold’s “Dover Beach” is not only about the beach, however, and the rough sea films need not be only about the physical subject they portray. The beach is used as a way to access a deeper ethos present in the culture at the time. To imagine that the movement in the frame is the only attraction would be to ignore the ideological powers that arts and attractions are generally acknowledged to possess. Arnold invokes the sea in order to recall the “turbid ebb and flow/ of human misery” (17-18). The constant change is frightening and the narrator begs fidelity from his lover, asserting that the world “Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,/ nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain” (33-34). Certitude must, therefore, be sought in one’s love rather than in the natural world or in human nature. The poem then, although first published in 1867, is indicative of the anxieties which would accompany modernity. Constant change is frightful. It leads to destruction and human misery.

While there is nothing to indicate that Acres or Bamforth and Sons were aware of the poem, or that they were purposefully recalling it in their productions, the same ideas of constant change and the powerful nature of the sea are certainly illuminated in the early animated photographs. It is possible that audiences who were familiar with Arnold’s poem may have been reminded of the themes from the earlier work when viewing the animated pictures. However, even for one with no familiarity with “Dover Beach,” many of the same responses are elicited. In these shots the relative distance between people and nature is illustrated. It is not uncommon for early actualities to capture the life and movement of people, but the photographers of these shots choose to eliminate people from the frame. The audience is awed not only by the animated picture
technology but also by the forcefulness of the ocean. The power and grandeur of the sea is showcased, and human connection is removed. There is no lover here from whom to seek solace. People are, therefore, insignificant in the grand scheme of nature.

The position of the audience relative to the ocean is also significant. The nineteenth-century saw the development of many “viewing” technologies. The kinetograph and the projected motion picture were just two more in a long line of technologies which mandated that the audience be an external “looker,” far removed from the object viewed. The act of looking is highlighted in the early motion pictures *Rough Sea at Dover* and *Rough Sea* not only because they are technologies of vision themselves, but also because they eliminate other senses which are important in other arts. Arnold’s poem begins with the essential paradox between the way things look, and the way things sound. The sea looks calm, but sounds fierce. The aural experience which Arnold discusses in the poem

![Image](www.victorian-cinema.net)

*Figure 4.3*  
A man using the earpieces for a kinetophone. <www.victorian-cinema.net>
is eliminated from these films, and the ocean is portrayed instead as a purely visual experience. Popular belief may attribute this to the lack of technology available with which to portray sound and vision. Aside from being a technologically deterministic assumption, this theory is simply not true. There was much experimentation with “stereophonography” and “kinetophone” united with animated photography in the 1890s. The kinetoscope, which Acres utilized, and the projected motion picture, which Bamforth and Sons used, were, at least, no less experimental than the stereophonograph and kinetophone (fig. 4.4).\textsuperscript{49} These producers chose to portray the sea purely visually. In the films, the power of the sea must be understood through the act of looking, and therefore looking becomes a powerful way of understanding and relating to the world. For example, in order to view Acres’ \textit{Rough Sea at Dover} kinetograph, the viewer is required to look through a view-finder at the film as it moves past a light source. The viewer’s attention must necessarily be drawn to the distance between the image and the self. The image is contained in the kinetoscope; neither the image nor the original, the sea, occupies the same space, or even the same time, as the viewer. In this technology, the viewer is isolated from and is external to the natural world. Viewing here makes it difficult to access human comfort and removes the viewer from any direct experience with nature. In Bamforth and Sons’ \textit{Rough Sea} an audience of many people watched the projected film. While the audience structure predicates a collection of people, the method of viewing, all people sitting facing the screen and therefore not interacting with

\textsuperscript{49} The fact that sound cinema was not commercialized until over twenty years later further supports the argument that the divide between physical and visual experience and the transitory nature of life, both of which were explored through “silent” motion pictures, were more pressing concerns in late nineteenth-century visual culture.
each other, highlights the lack of human connection in a world which is built around this kind of looking. As Jean-Louis Baudry states, this darkened room allows “no exchange, no circulation, no communication with any outside” (352). Human connection is not destroyed by the powerful ocean portrayed on the screen, but rather by the act of viewing, which is compulsory in the modern world. The very method of looking formalizes the act of scrutinizing the outside world while simultaneously eliminating human connection.

If constant change and transparency are themes used to imagine women’s subjectivity, and in these films the constant change of the sea and the transparent medium of the projected motion picture is destructive to human connection, then women’s subjectivity is also configured as destructive. At the turn of the century, early projected motion pictures employed these visual motifs which had been used to figure women’s subjectivity throughout the century to construct the emerging modern subject. This occurs when human subjects are added to the frame, and the audience is reminded that they not only scrutinizers, but are also often the objects of scrutiny. For example, Mitchell and Kenyon were a photography team that travelled England capturing images of “everyday life” during the fin de siècle. One of their earliest surviving films Messrs

50 Baudry goes on to argue that the cinematic structure recreates the conditions of the Lacanian mirror stage which creates a specific formation of subjectivity. Lacan’s mirror creates a subjectivity because it “assembles the fragmented body in a sort of imaginary integration of the self.” The identification with the cinema screen creates the “transcendental self” where the “fragments… of lived experience” are united to create meaning. This meaning, however, is created by the transcendental self by positioning things around itself in a way that it can understand (352-55). My argument here is more straight-forward. I am arguing that being “chained, captured, or captivated,” as Baudry calls it (352), by the cinematic apparatus causes isolation from others. Therefore, the act of looking has the potential to destroy human relationships. When one finds that s/he is examined as a cinematic projection is, this also has the potential to destroy the individual subject, or the self.
"Lumb and Co Leaving the Works, Huddersfield" (1900) begins by panning over a small canal of the Yorkshire river, but, unlike the rough seas films, it also captures workers and domiciles along the riverbanks within the frame. While Bamforth and Sons and Acres choose to eliminate human interaction from the frame, Mitchell and Kenyon use the contrast between the human and natural elements to highlight the industrial nature of Huddersfield. As the film proceeds, another shot captures people leaving their work in the factories along the riverbanks and walking through the street. The film would have been exhibited for the people in Huddersfield, which might hint at an attempt to make personal connections between those on screen and those in the audience, however, this connection is interrupted by the structure of the theater and by exposure to earlier films. Arguably, by 1900, the audience’s position in relation to the subjects on the screen was already formalized.

R. W. Paul’s The Derby (1896) positions audiences in a very similar way as Acres’ Rough Sea at Dover and Bamforth and Sons’ Rough Sea do. The entire film consists of one shot from a fixed camera position. In the foreground, the audience sees the back of people’s heads as they look onto the racetrack. The horses run past the camera, and the on-screen audience walks onto the racetrack in order to follow the horses. At first, the theater audience is subsumed into the film. By facing the back of the audience who is watching the sporting event, Paul gives the illusion that the theater audience is at the race and a part of the crowd. This momentarily eliminates the divide between the audience and the characters on the screen. It gives the illusion that the race is happening as the theater audience watches, making it current rather than a past event.
It also unites the on-screen audience and the theater audience, allowing for a human connection between the two to be made. Of course, the audiences are united by their very acts of looking. At first, the subject of the film which is made to be scrutinized is the race, not the on-screen audience. The horses, whether seen at the races or seen in films of the races, are simply objects to examine, wager on, and derive pleasure from. As soon as the on-screen audience moves onto the track, the unity between the theater audience and the on-screen audience is broken. The theater audience has no mobility which the camera does not construct. As Paul makes the camera static throughout the film, the theater audience cannot follow the on-screen audience onto the track. The act of looking which once connects the audiences now breaks that connection. By moving onto the track the on-screen audience becomes the spectacle that the theater audience examines and the human connection between the two is eliminated.

The mobility of the workers leaving their work in *Messrs Lumb and Co* also draws attention to the audience’s immobility, but the human connection between the audience and the image is further diminish by the very exhibition of the film. Since the film was shown to the workers in the industrial town where it was filmed, the “characters” on the screen were very likely to be in the audience. Mitchell and Kenyon’s film has an ambiguous relationship to the audience. While one might recognize himself on the screen, thereby establishing identification with the screen image, he must also be aware that he cannot be in the audience and in front of the audience simultaneously. Therefore, the idea that the person on the screen is simply an image, is immediately apparent to the audience-member who is watching himself walk down the street. This
same audience member must also be aware that his image, or what is now the “subject” of the film, is being watched by himself and others. By scrutinizing the image himself, he is also developing the knowledge that others are scrutinizing the image and analyzing it as they see fit. This same realization is likely to take place in the audience of The Derby. If the audience at the racetrack can be examined as an image, surely the audience in the theater can as well! By making oneself an image and watching it on a screen, the individual subject is removed from the self and becomes the analytical property of the viewer. On the one hand, adding people to the frame provides a human connection for the audience, yet the act of scrutinizing those on the screen creates a distance between the audience and the image, just as it does in the rough sea films, and further destroys this human connection, even with the self.

Women’s bodies had a history of being described, both visually and literarily, as ephemeral. Throughout the nineteenth-century women had been described as “angels in the house,” in Coventry Patmore’s poem of the same name, or illusory scratches in a mirror, as in Eliot’s description of Rosamond in Middlemarch. These descriptions require the bodies to be image-based, transparent, and therefore, mutable. As the separation between the image and the self began to encompass others, resistance to the loss of control over the personal image was also registered in early film. By capturing male subjects on transparent film and projecting them onscreen to be scrutinized, early projected motion pictures contributed to the awareness that all political subjects were easily removed from their individuality when reduced to imaginary subjects. In other words, these early films showed how easily everyone could become the ethereal
projections of other’s desires: the emerging modern subject is the nineteenth-century imaginary woman.

In R. W. Paul’s film *The Countryman and the Cinematograph or The Countryman’s First Sight of the Animated Pictures* (1901), for example, a man rails against his image being captured on film. The film is made up of three different episodes. In the first the man climbs on the stage in front of the screen to “express his delight” with the dancer that is being pictured (R.W. Paul’s catalogue description- in *The Countryman and the Cinematograph*). Then the man is frightened by a train rushing towards him on the screen and he runs away. Finally, the animated picture shows the man wooing a woman. The man becomes enraged by this final image of himself, and he pulls down the cinematic screen, revealing the cinematic apparatus, which are behind the screen. He then abuses the projection operator. The progression of the images in the story is very important. The first instance shows that the man, although unfamiliar with the motion picture apparatus, is delighted with its ability to remove the individuality from the woman dancing, and make her an image for his pleasure. He does not attempt to touch the woman on the screen, but instead pantomimes his amusement. His fear of the approaching train suggests that, although he was aware that the dancer was not a physical body, he is not aware of the power of the cinema to render all objects physically harmless images. The joke in the film is that he is an unsophisticated “yokel” who is unaware of the power of cinema. When his own image is projected, his rage can be read as anger that he was unaware of the camera, that he is on display for the general public, and that he has been separated from his subjectivity by being made an image. He attempts to
control his image once again, by tearing down the screen. While the film is comical, the warning is clear. With the new technology, an unsophisticated viewer may not be aware that his image is being captured for public consumption. The warning is not only to be aware of the reproduction of one’s image, but also to be a sophisticated viewer.

The sophisticated viewer can turn the cinematic apparatus against itself. For example, in James Williamson’s *The Big Swallow* (1901), a man protests his picture being taken and uses photographic perspective to eliminate the problem. The catalogue describes the film as “‘I won’t! I won’t! I’ll eat the camera first.’” Gentleman reading, finds a camera fiend with his head under a cloth, focusing him up. He orders him off…” *(The Big Swallow).* The catalogue description is required for the film to make sense. On screen, the picture begins with the man yelling at the camera, then he gets closer and closer, opening his mouth wide until all the audience sees is the inside of his mouth. As he backs away from the camera, he is chewing and licking his lips as if he has eaten the camera. The man here is a sophisticated viewer who understands how cameras work and is not caught on film unawares. Although the camera keeps him in the frame, showing that he has clearly not eaten the camera, while he chews and licks his lips in order for the joke to be complete, the limitations of photographic technology are illustrated. The camera loses perspective easily when people or objects move too close to the lens, or with different types of lenses. Clearly the man here protests being captured as an image, but his knowledge of the perspective enables him to render the film useless. He is also a consumer of photography. Yet, paradoxically, for all his sophistication and knowledge of perspective, he fails to eliminate the photograph of himself. The audience is still
watching him as he eats the camera. The end of the film shows that resistance to the
imaginary nature of cinema is futile. All subjects, even sophisticated resistant ones, will
eventually be captured as images to be examined by a viewing public.

Perhaps one of the most interesting examples of characters railing against visual
technologies is George Albert Smith’s *As Seen Through a Telescope* (1900). In the film
an old man looks at a young couple in the park through his telescope. The young man
helps the woman retie her shoe, and pats her ankle while doing so. The camera then cuts
to a close-up, masked shot of the exposed ankle and the hand caressing it, which is what
the old man is seeing. When the caress is finished, the young man and woman continue
walking. As they pass the old man, the young lady continues walking without seeming to
notice him. The young man, however, punches the old man in the head, knocking him
off of his stool. This could be read as the young man nobly defending the honor of the
young lady. However, when seen against the backdrop of the other contemporaneous
motion pictures, it seems more likely that the young man has a problem with himself
being scrutinized through the use of a visual technology, the telescope. The woman
passes without noticing because women have a history of being constructed through
optical technologies. The telescope which examines this woman’s body is certainly no
more invasive than the telescope which becomes Alice’s body in *Alice’s Adventures in
Wonderland*. In this film, the older visual technology of the telescope is a dangerous way
to be a peeping tom. The cinematic apparatus is endorsed as a much safer way to be a
voyeur. The motion picture audience does not get punched even though they see the
same images of the couple that the old man sees. In this film, the camera offers a layer of
protection for the viewer. The latest visual technology, the projected motion picture, is simultaneously a venue through which the subject will be examined but also the protection for that same subject as he examines others.

Throughout the nineteenth-century the language and philosophy surrounding visual technologies were used to describe women in a way that separated them from their individual subjectivity. The concepts of absence/presence, constant fluctuation, and subvisibility which are present in fiction, poetry, and in scientific prose texts show that there was much interaction between the ideas expressed in science and those consumed in the reading public. The echo between such works as Holmes’ discussion of the stereoscope and Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* further illustrate this exchange of philosophy. The projected motion picture, which emerged late in the century, ushered a new subject into the fin de siècle. This subject was based on the same troublesome concepts which had constructed feminine subjectivity as a lack which could be filled by the viewer. When captured on film, all people were merely transparent women.
Chapter 5: New Technologies, Old Stories

While the focus of this dissertation has been nineteenth-century British contexts of visual technologies, I believe the cultural relevance of these arguments can be found in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American contexts as well.

The themes of material and fluid sight, and of the tension between the observer and the observed, and the use of image-making technologies to explore these themes, can be found in twentieth century films. *Chinatown*, for example, creates a neo-Victorian relationship between the visual technologies and the female body. The theme of optics technology is introduced in the first shot of the film. Jake Gittes is showing a man a picture of his wife cheating on him. This picture, a photograph and therefore a Victorian image-capturing technology, is an indictment of the wife. The photograph, it is implied, is a material witness to the wife’s indiscretions. There is an implication that the husband accepts the photograph as valid evidence of his wife’s cheating. The nature of sight is positioned in this opening scene as a way to police the domestic sphere of marriage. The wife is stepping outside of her place within the institution, and is caught by the camera. This recalls the institution of marriage as outlined in Victorian texts, such as Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* and Patmore’s *The Angel in the House*. In these texts, women are contained within the marital contract. The camera strips agency from the woman, allowing no expression or voice with which to combat the interpretation of the photographic representation. However, the rest of the film will work to deconstruct and complicate the veracity of such picture-making technologies.
The opening shot is simply a way to introduce the importance of visual technologies. The story begins when Hollis Mulwray is photographed and his agency is stripped from him. The photograph effeminizes him. While the film story is ostensibly about Jake Gittes investigating Hollis, there is no scene with Hollis that is not viewed through Gittes’ surveilling eye. Gittes’ eye and the camera in the opening scenes are one in the same. They each capture visual evidence of disturbed domestic arrangements and they immobilize their victims. The woman in the picture with Hollis is supposedly his mistress. She also has no voice in the photograph, but her identity is assigned to her by Gittes. The photograph at the beginning of the film acts within a panoptic model of vision. The photograph captures deviance, the observed does not know when they are being watched, and the image is used to regulate behavior. When these pictures are published in the newspaper, they have a crippling effect on his career and he dies shortly thereafter. Hollis is never able to defend or explain himself, and he never is allowed a confrontational scene with Gittes. Instead, Hollis’ wife is left to contest his position as the observed. Hollis is emasculated and Evelyn is left to mediate visions of him.

When Evelyn is introduced in the film, Hollis is still alive, yet, she alone confronts Gittes for his intrusion into her married life. She fights not for her marriage, but for control over who examines it. The investigation was not ordered by her, and therefore she claims that it was not valid. She assumes the position that Hollis is hers through marriage, and that she should have the right to decide who looks at him and in what manner they look. This inverts Victorian constructions of marriage. Instead of being a part of her husband, and losing her own identity, Hollis is simply a part of her
identity. She speaks for him. Hollis is feminized not only by his inability to act, but also by his position within the frame of the camera and his wife’s assumption of control over his visual representation. Evelyn is masculinized in her confrontation with Gittes and by her control over the surveillance of her marriage, her husband, and herself. This is a position for which she will be severely punished by the end of the film. Evelyn is fluid, both in sight and in subjectivity. Gittes cannot easily read her because she is withholding information about him. He expects her to be easily contained within social institutions, but she is not. Her past has shaped who she is. She understands herself and her world differently from the way that others understand it. While Hollis’ visibility leads to his destruction, Evelyn is envisioned as a femme fatale who uses her visibility to her advantage. She manipulates the ways that she is seen and her very visibility makes her an erotic, exotic woman. Eventually, just as Alice’s is in her adventures in Wonderland and the Looking Glass world, her fluidity must be contained and rendered ineffectual.

The camera and photograph are not the only visual technologies that govern the symbolic logic of the film. The glasses that reveal the true identity of Hollis’ murderer also reveal the complex negotiations of sight and truth. By this point in the film, Evelyn has lost her power over the surveillance of her personal life. This is seen when Gittes follows her to her home where her daughter/sister is staying. He peeks into the window to see the two women together. This moment conceptualizes her increasing lack of “knowing” which takes place over the course of the film. She begins as the knowing individual who is manipulating the information to which Gittes has access. When Gittes confronts her with the glasses, she cannot say whose they are, but she knows that they are
not Hollis’ because they are bifocals. Gittes resumes some of his control over the story by deducing to whom the glasses belong, and by abandoning the the camera for a more nuanced vision of the bifocals which represent fluid vision. Bifocals enable seeing two different spaces with the same amount of clarity. They belong to Evelyn’s father, Cross, who sees his daughter the same way he should see his wife. The nature of the bifocal allows Cross to violate the natural order of the domestic circle. His is the vision that prevails at the end of the film. He is not punished, and in the final scene, leads his grand/daughter away from the car. Evelyn, as a female purveyor of fluid sight, is not so lucky. Her veiling of truth, assumption of a masculine role, and involvement in the grotesque domestic plot are punished in the most violent manner available to cinema. She is shot through the head, removing her eye. She is once again contained as an observable body that cannot observe. The last shot of her in the film is a distant observation of her lifeless body that is missing an eye.

The reading of Chinatown is a somewhat abstract reading of a film that engages with many of the themes in nineteenth-century visual culture. However, the stories and images from the nineteenth-century continue to enjoy a life in current culture. For example, on January 27, 2011 Wintersmagic posted a feature entitled, “Art That Caught My Eye: The Lady of Shalott.” The post includes forty-four images created by different artists from the website Deviantart.com within the last six years. They are all images that capture different aspects of the legendary story, and many feature the Lady herself prominently. One, entitled The Lady of Shalott by Avril White, screenname Elfdaughter, is particularly interesting in that it specifically references Tennyson’s poem. The original
The artists’ post includes the stanza from the poem where the Lady leaves her loom. The image captures the Lady standing in front of a stained glass window which is across the river from a castle. While the stained glass and the position of the tower, which in this conceptualization is at ground level, are features of the artist’s own creation, her preponderance with the importance of the light featured in the image is revealing. She states that she “added the light beams to the middle window… played with the lighting on [the Lady] until [she] was satisfied… added coloured light beams on the floor” and “added in some coloured light beams from the stained glass window.”

White is familiar with the poem, and has interpreted the poem to be about light and color. She has done so using a visual medium to express what she finds as important in the
story. The Lady is solitary, she is separated from the outside world, and this separation is enacted through color and light rays.

Malgorzata Maj’s image, entitled Shalott also references the poem. In her discussions with commentators on her site, she states that “the poem is brilliant.” Her image captures the Lady, sitting in her casement longingly looking out the window. The Lady’s world is characterized by a hazy grey tone, filmy curtains billowing around her, and white light emerging through the window. The image is manipulated to look like a nineteenth-century daguerreotype. Maj captures the grey drabness that surrounds the Lady in Tennyson’s poem and emphasizes her solitude in a photograph that recalls nineteenth-century visual technologies.

While White’s lady is situated at ground level and Maj uses the grey tones to delineate her solitude, Stijn Desmedt, a Belgian artist, captures the ethos of the poem by
photographing a tower amidst a blurry wood. His *The Lady of Shalott* does not feature the Lady at all, but instead focuses on the structure which holds her away from the rest of the world. The Lady’s isolation is felt in the image and, much like in Tennyson’s poem, she retains her invisibility. She is not visible to the people of Camelot, and in Desmedt’s image she is not visible to the viewer of the image. Urzula Ciolkowska makes the Lady highly visible in her death. In her image, a woman dressed all in white lays on a tree trunk which is emerging from the river. Behind her a boat floats in the water. In the distance, mystical symbols in three rings hover above the Lady, and in the foreground, the woman’s glassy countenance stares blankly into the distance. In her description of her image, Ciolkowska notes the thirteenth-century story, Malory’s version of it in the fifteenth-century, and the poem by Tennyson. She is aware of the many iterations of the
story and the Lady, and is participating in a tradition of envisioning the Lady. Perhaps most interesting is the medium in which Ciolkowska works. Her *Lady of Shalott* is a photom Manipulation that uses stock images from users Caitlin “Rammkitty,” Chris “Riktorsashen,” David “Shoofly,” and “Obsidian Dawn” together to create her effects.

Once again, a visual technology, photography and digital image-making, is being used to reimagine how women are examined and the possibilities for envisioning them.

The fact that there are so many images in the original posting by Wintersmagic, shows that the story of the Lady of Shalott continues in the cultural imagination. These images all use different technologies and media, and these artists are all in communication with each other. The images are not confined to one region, but enjoy a life of their own in the digital platform which allows people from very diverse regions to collaborate. Ciolkowska and Maj are both Polish, Desmedt is Belgian, and White is

![Figure C. 4](image)


“Riktorsashen,” David “Shoofly,” and “Obsidian Dawn” together to create her effects.
British. The digital technology allows all of these people to imagine what the Lady’s story should look like and to share it with each other. The fact that Wintersmagic felt that these images were all important enough to collect shows similarly that these images are still felt to be culturally important. The Lady of Shalott continues to have a haunting presence in the world and new technologies allow her to be continually reiterated. These images allow viewers to think about the original story, and also make one think about how new media technologies change the ways that women understand themselves in their world.
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