The Encounter of an Elderly Man and a Young Woman in Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography: *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (1865), *Prospero and Miranda* (1865), and *Vivien and Merlin* (1874)

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Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) is one of the most renowned Victorian photographers, whose innovative oeuvre attests to her penchant for beauty. Not only does her legacy comprise portraits of eminent contemporaries, but she also ventured to create her own staged photographs inspired by literature. *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (1865), *Prospero and Miranda* (1865), and *Vivien and Merlin* (1874) bear a striking resemblance to one another and depict a similar leitmotif: the relationship of an elderly man and a young woman. The present paper explores the connection between the male and female characters by interpreting the photographs' visual language and unveiling the underlying significance of the characters' touches and power relations: it examines the femininity of Juliet, Miranda and Vivien in the Victorian social context to demonstrate how they embody the cultural stereotypes of the *angel in the house* and the *fallen woman*.

Keywords: Victorian photography, Victorian femininity, staged photographs, Shakespearean illustrations, Tennysonian illustrations

1 Introduction

A pictorial photographic trend emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, as Quentin Bajac explains, which proves to be an English peculiarity. This is so-called High Art Photography aimed at imitating the most noble genres of painting, with Oscar Gustav Rejlander, William Lake Price and Henry Peach Robinson being its most significant advocates. Their photographs depicted religious and historical themes or allegories, and drew inspiration from the Italian Renaissance, the contemporary Pre-Raphaelites or the works of William Shakespeare, Walter Scott, or Alfred Tennyson. This trend faded away by the early 1860s, yet amateur photographers such as Lady Clementina Hawarden, Lewis Carroll, and, most importantly, Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879) still produced such narrative scenes in the 1870s (Bajac 2002, 104–8).

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Julia Margaret Cameron was one of the most renowned Victorian photographers, who had a trailblazing career, and left a profound mark on the history of photography. In 1863, she started her career in photography after she had received a camera from her daughter and son-in-law, to embark upon a journey to explore and cement the relationship between art and photography (Prodger 2018, 206). Apart from immersing herself in portraiture, she ventured into creating photographs inspired by literature; as she wrote in a letter to Sir John Herschel, she aspired to "ennoble photography and to secure for it the character & uses of High Art by combining the real & Ideal & sacrificing nothing of truth by all possible devotion to Poetry & beauty" (qtd. in Prodger 2018, 210). As one might observe, Cameron's illustrative works were mainly based on mythological and Biblical themes and were also inspired by literary sources, most notably by Shakespeare and Tennyson (Springer and Weiss 2023, 20).

As Springer and Weiss argue, in the twentieth century Cameron was renowned for being a pioneering portrait photographer, and her staged tableaux, which form a significant portion of her oeuvre, were disdained as paragons of Victorian bad taste. They were "rediscovered" and reassessed in the 1980s, and since then they have been published and exhibited (2023, 8). The authors point out in their recent book *Julia Margaret Cameron – Arresting Beauty* that "the stage is now set for visual exploration of her career, from the portrait of a child dubbed her 'first success' to the ambitious tableaux she created to illustrate Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*" (19). Cameron's photography is imbued with familial relationships, and intimacy between generations through tactility is a recurring theme (18). As Amanda Hopkinson argues, a large number of Cameron's photographs concentrate on the recurring theme of "the inter-relationship between an elderly, venerable and often powerful 'potentate' or 'prelate' juxtaposed with a young maiden, often in an attitude of appeal"[1] since her early works (1986, 140). Cameron was fascinated by young women, and most of the time she contradicted her own principle that "no woman between the ages of eighteen and eighty should allow herself to be photographed" (14–15). She took a different approach with their photographs as opposed to those of men. Excluding a few images that have names of some female acquaintances as titles, her women do not possess names, as they were not well-known. Female figures were featured mostly in her allegories and Cameron empowered them with the significance which they lacked in real life: she frequently provided the photographs with titles later (14–15).

[1] Hopkinson also speculates on what Cameron's underlying reasons could have been for being preoccupied with this particular relationship and treating it with such delicacy, especially in Shakespeare's works. She surmises that the absence of Cameron's father, the lack of male companions in her youth, later being in the company of older and notable men of her time, and eventually marrying a man twenty years her senior might have contributed to placing such relationships at the centre of her photography (1986, 18).

Literature on Cameron tends to investigate her illustrations based on the common literary themes, but not from a visual point of view or in the context of the contemporary cultural scene. The present paper seeks to contribute to this venture of visual exploration, and juxtaposes three of Cameron's photographs inspired by literature, which bear a striking resemblance to one another, centring around a similar leitmotif: the dramatic encounter between an elderly man and a young woman. This is an unprecedented approach in research on Cameron. *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (1865), *Prospero and Miranda* (1865), and *Vivien and Merlin* (1874) explore two Shakespearean and one Tennysonian scene, respectively. The male and female characters, their interactions and their touch are placed at the focal point of each photograph, alluding to a much deeper meaning. Every photograph suggests conscious and meticulous planning. Cameron utilises the light strategically to enhance the details, attesting to dramatic, theatrical features. Her models are visually appealing with convincing physical features for the characters (although finding an appropriate Vivien was a bit cumbersome – an issue that ties in with Victorian concepts of femininity and is to be explored later). At first, the photographs are to be examined individually, decoding the visual toolkit Cameron used to suggest power relations, dominance and dynamics between the characters, and the underlying meaning of their touch is to be analysed. Then, following a brief insight into Victorian England, the female characters' femininity is explored in the Victorian sociocultural context.

Sylvia Wolf, who compiled an entire volume, *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women*, claims at the very beginning that literal illustrations of texts "seem to me the least successful of Cameron's works, resembling the tableaux-vivants of Victorian after-dinner entertainment, just as her beautiful women look less beautiful the more the details of their dress are articulated" (1998, 14). Although tastes might differ, hopefully, this paper achieves its goal and unravels the depth of these images.

2 *Friar Laurence and Juliet*

Take thou this vial, being then in bed,
And this distilled liquor drink thou off;
When presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour, for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease:
No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest;
The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To paly ashes, thy eyes' windows fall,
Like death when he shuts up the day of life;

Each part, depriv'd of supple government,
Shall, stiff and stark and cold, appear like death;
And in this borrow'd likeness of shrunk death
Thou shalt continue two and forty hours,
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep. (Shakespeare [1597] 2010, 4.1.93–106)

Figure 1 *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (1865)

Figure 2 *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (1865)

In 1865, Cameron produced versions on the Friar Laurence and Juliet theme with identical titles, which show slight modifications,[2] probably depicting somewhat different moments of the scene. Two significantly different versions exist, one featuring the vial of potion (fig. 1), and another, in lieu of the potion, representing a more visible Juliet clasping the friar's hand (fig. 2).

The photographs feature Henry Taylor, the renowned dramatist and poet, who portrays Friar Laurence, and Mary Hillier, Cameron's parlour maid, who embodies the youthful Juliet. Cameron captured numerous portraits of Taylor; furthermore, he was eager to contribute to Cameron's narrative photographs by portraying fictional and Biblical figures. As Kirsty Stonell Walker points out, Taylor, in spite of being an eminent poet of the era and a gentleman, was eager to pose with maids,[3] and his

[2] Two versions are scrutinised in the case of each title, the ones that feature the most significant differences.

[3] Cameron's illustrations might even seem a bit radical, as they blurred boundaries between the social classes: "her tableaux are parables of radical democracy, or, seen from a slightly different angle, real-life fairytales: in Cameron's glass house, Cinderella is always becoming a princess" (Wolf 1998, 15). Henry Taylor and Charles Hay Cameron usually portrayed kingly or wise men; at the same time, servant girls could embody the heroines (Hopkinson 1986, 140).

positive attitude also provided Cameron with the opportunity to create powerful staged scenes (2020, 97). As Cameron recounts in her autobiography, *The Annals of My Glass House*:

> Our chief friend, Sir Henry Taylor, lent himself greatly to my early efforts. Regardless of the possible dread that sitting to my fancy might be making a fool of himself, he, with greatness which belongs to unselfish affection, consented to be in turn Friar Laurence with Juliet, Prospero with Miranda, Ahasuerus with Queen Esther, to hold my poker as his sceptre, and do whatever I desired of him.… ([1874] 2016, 55)

The first image (fig. 1) is the photographic rendition of the exact scene quoted above: the friar hands the poison to Juliet saying, "[t]ake thou this vial" and unveiling his contriving plan. The most eye-catching part that might immediately grasp the viewer's attention is the highly lit forehead of Friar Laurence, which dominates the scene. As Nichole J. Fazio implies, this alludes to the friar being the source of wisdom, who Juliet turns to for counsel, and as she receives guidance, her face is illuminated by the light radiating from his forehead. The two faces and the man's hand grasping the vial stand out from the otherwise darker and simple background. Both heads are covered, and both characters wear dark clothes, which enhance their faces. Juliet tilts her head upwards and glances at the wise man: she seems to be a young woman seeking guidance, yet in control of her emotions. The composition of the picture is triangular, emphasising the figures' power-relationship: the friar is seated higher than the woman, thus looks downward at Juliet, creating the impression of a dominating paternal figure (2023, 118).

The second image (fig. 2) distances the two characters, yet it elevates them to almost the same level on the visual plane. Similarly, Friar Laurence's face is well-lit, fully turned towards Juliet, who is photographed in full profile. Instead of the dark robes, Juliet dons a white dress, lending her a more prominent role in the scene. No vial appears here, and their gentle clasp with both hands connects the two figures (Fazio 2023, 120). Thus, the latter photograph radiates more intimacy and tenderness.

3 *Prospero and Miranda*

No harm.
I have done nothing but in care of thee,
Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter, who
Art ignorant of what thou art, nought knowing
Of whence I am, nor that I am more better
Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell,
And thy no greater father.
(Shakespeare [1610–1611] 2010, 1.2.15–21)

Figure 3 *Prospero and Miranda* (1865)

Figure 4 *Prospero and Miranda* (1865)

In the same year as Cameron produced versions of *Friar Laurence and Juliet* (figs. 1 and 2), she also made another series of strikingly similar photos, this time entitled *Prospero and Miranda*. It is Henry Taylor once again who personifies the magician, almost seated the same way as before, but in the role of the young woman Mary Ryan,[4] Cameron's servant, appears, who bears a likeness to Mary Hillier's Juliet. In

[4] As Stonell Walker claims, Cameron found Mary Ryan in the street with her mother, an Irish immigrant. She took Mary home and trained her as a servant, and helped the mother to find work (2020, 65). An intriguing anecdote is attached to these photographs: their making led Henry John Stedman Cotton to propose to Mary Ryan (Springer and Weiss 2023, 188). In Stonell Walker's retelling of the anecdote, the young man, , who was later made a lord, saw the photographs at an exhibition, bought every print that Ryan modelled for, and later was bold enough to show up at the doorstep of Dimbola Lodge,

the *Prospero and Miranda* photographs, Prospero, the magician father, is seated again on the left, looking at his daughter. There is a physical connection between the two figures, firmly holding each other's hands (Fazio 2023, 121), which probably marks the moment when he reveals his past. The only difference between the two versions is that Cameron made minor adjustments to how Prospero holds his head. In one version, he faces Miranda (fig. 3), while in the other one, there is a patronising tilt (fig. 4) that might allude to the line "my daughter, who // Art ignorant of what thou art." The kneeling girl is looking up at her father, and her posture might hint at a certain level of tension. Her hair is let down, uncovered, giving her the appearance of an innocent young girl. The composition again is somewhat triangular, putting Prospero in a higher, superior position with his well-lit forehead, and the kneeling girl gazing up at him.

4 *Vivien and Merlin*

he was mute:
So dark a forethought roll'd about his brain,
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence: wherefore, when she lifted up
A face of sad appeal, and spake and said,
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and again,
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and once more,
'Great Master, do ye love me?' he was mute.
And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slided up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake; and letting her left hand
Droop from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf,
Made with her right a comb of pearl to part
The lists of such a board as youth gone out
Had left in ashes: (Tennyson [1869] 2009, 226–43)

where the Camerons lived, to propose to Mary (2020, 124). As Cameron recalled in *The Annals of My Glass House*: "entirely out of the *Prospero and Miranda* picture sprung a marriage which has, I hope, cemented the welfare and well-being of a real King Copethua who, in the Miranda, saw the prize which has proved a jewel in that monarch's crown" ([1874] 2016, 56).

Figure 5 *Vivien and Merlin* (1874)

Figure 6 *Vivien and Merlin* (1874)

Inspired by Tennyson's retelling of the Arthurian legend, *The Idylls of the King* (1859–1885) – for which Tennyson himself commissioned Cameron to produce illustrations – the *Vivien and Merlin* photographs are probably the most dissimilar to the ones introduced above. Sylvia Wolf in *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women* points out that Vivien embodies the archetype of the *femme fatale*, and her character was inspired by Thomas Malory's Nimue (1998, 96). In Tennyson's rendition of the story, it is Merlin who is pursued by Vivien, who – driven by her love of power – seduces Merlin in a forest. Thus, the female figure portrayed in these photographs is not an ingenue (as Miranda and Juliet). It is worth mentioning that given Tennyson's portrayal of Vivien as a vicious woman, even Cameron would have hesitated to have a model of that archetype in her studio (Wolf 1998, 106). Cameron was concerned about how the inherent character manifested in appearance, but she experienced difficulty with the embodiment of Vivien, and seemed perplexed when she reflected on the difficulty of portraying Vivien. She had the impression that though the model was "lissome and graceful and piquante" she was "a sweet girl" perhaps "not wicked eno'" (qtd. in Wolf 1998, 101). The Victorians regarded Vivien as degenerate (Wolf 1998, 103) and as the model for the seductress later reminiscences: "Mrs. Cameron had determined that I was to be Vivien. I very much objected to this, because Vivien did not seem to me to be a very nice character to assume. In addition to my having

to portray the objectionable Vivien, I discovered, to my dismay, that Mrs. Cameron had designed her husband for Merlin – for Mr. Cameron was given to fits of hilarity which always came in the wrong places" (qtd. in Gernsheim 1975, 43).

Vivien, the sorceress, portrayed by Agnes Mangles, is situated on the left side of the picture wearing a light-coloured dress that enhances her presence. Charles Cameron,[5] Julia Margaret Cameron's husband, posing as Merlin, is on the right, seated, and his white hair is set sharply against the background. As Joanne Lukitsh indicates, the photograph depicts the exact moment when Vivien seduces Merlin, the King's ally, and uses her charm to trap him later in an oak tree (2001, 116). Wolf observes that Tennyson portrayed Vivien as the embodiment of the serpent in the poem, which can be observed, for instance, in the French illustrator, Gustave Doré's engraving entitled *Merlin and Vivien Repose* (1868). In Cameron's depictions, however, this serpentine feature cannot be identified (Wolf 1998, 97–98).

In the first image (fig. 5), the composition is yet again triangular. The key moment is depicted when Vivien "writhed toward him, slided up his knee and sat." Wolf points out that although Vivien is placed slightly lower, resolutely touching the wizard's chest and stroking his beard, she seems to be in the superior position within the frame. This photograph is similar to the previous ones: we see a somewhat sensual, yet not too passionate touch, which might be attributed to the decency of the era and to practical circumstances, namely the length of the exposure time. Mangles later recounted that although Charles Cameron, with his countenance and fitting

5 Inevitably, biographical references should not be overlooked: Julia Margaret Cameron's husband, Charles Hay Cameron was twenty years her senior (Olsen 2015, 56). The Camerons shared a loving and fulfilling marriage, as the photographer recounts in her autobiography:

> My husband from first to last has watched every picture with delight, and it is my daily habit to run to him with every glass upon which a fresh glory is newly stamped, and to listen to his enthusiastic applause. This habit of running into the dining-room with my wet picture has stained such an immense quantity of table linen with nitrate of silver, indelible stains, that I should have been banished from any less indulgent household. ([1874] 2016, 55)

Julia Margaret Cameron adored her husband, referring to him as "the most beautiful old man in the world!" (qtd. in Lukitsh 2001, 24). Similarly, in a prayer she herself composed, Cameron expressed her sentiments as follows: "[m]ost blessed Lord… Thou alone dost know how fondly dear This my husband is to me, how great is his tenderness, how true is his love" (*Julia Margaret Cameron* 1996, 14). One might be tempted to speculate that Cameron's personal involvement is the underlying reason for dedicating attention and time to creating photographs that depict the relationship between an elderly man and a younger woman, as well as exploring the different layers of such relationships. The two Shakespearean scenes depict paternal figures and innocent young women, while in the Tennysonian scene a seductress is portrayed with the man being her victim; none of them imply a marital relationship based on mutual support and partnership.

looks, was an ideal model for portraying Merlin, he was prone to laughing, thus hindering the photography sessions, and ruining numerous negatives (qtd. in Wolf 1998, 99). The characters' hands are placed at the same level, Vivien is touching and seducing the man, whilst Merlin is grabbing the top part of the chair but is unable to resist her, and finally succumbs to her temptation (Lukitsh 2001, 116).

The photograph with the same title (fig. 6) features the characters standing. Vivien is closer to the camera and is amidst action: pointing her finger at Merlin's forehead, she is just about to cast the spell (Wolf 1998, 99). Furthermore, an oak tree-like prop is visible behind Merlin. This composition diminishes the character of the magician, as he is just about to be entrapped by the spell.

As Jeff Rosen highlights, Vivien embodies a negative example for women, she sins and, as a consequence, suffers for her deeds. The representation of the anti-heroine appears in the midst of articulating her "moral and social transgressions." Merlin is unable to speak, the very moment is depicted when "he was mute" and bewitched. When he is entrapped in the oak tree, it is another key moment when he becomes speechless: "for Merlin, overtalk'd and overworn, / Had yielded." Using the visual language of photography to imply muteness, Cameron chose to depict the wizard with closed eyes (Rosen 2017, 247–48).

5 Victorian Concepts of Femininity

In Victorian England, the concept of female duality existed, as among others Sarah Kühl points out: the constructs of the *angel in the house* and the *fallen woman* were prevalent. This distinction has Biblical and Christian roots: the first alludes to the Virgin Mary, immaculate, good, the instrument of God; while the latter can be linked to Eve, the seductress, sinful, and responsible for the fall of man (2016, 171–72).

Jan Marsh comments that the gender history in Victorian England has a twofold interpretation: the model of the patriarchy that secured privilege and power for men, and the roots of the "process of determined but gradual female challenge to their exclusion" (2001, 98). Providing a more nuanced vision than this dichotomous view, Lydia Murdoch highlights that there was no uniform life experience for women in Victorian England and resonates with John Stuart Mill's idea that the common features all women had were based on the condition of their subjugation (economic, social and legal). The ideals of femininity depended on social class, besides location, age and religion. Though the Great Reform Act of 1832 denied suffrage to all women, upper- and middle-class women still had the chance to take advantage of their social and financial positions. The aristocracy

and the landed gentry were less than 5% of the population, the middle and working classes formed the vast majority of the society and were distinguished by cultural values and their work alongside their financial status. The core values of the rising middle class were respectability, discipline and morality. Victorian society was also permeated by the separation of the public and private spheres. A clear distinction crystallised between the masculine realm of life (entailing business, politics, empire, warfare) and the feminine realm (domesticity, morality, religion, family life [2013, Introduction]). Suzanne Fagence Cooper recalls an article written for the *Saturday Review* in 1867 that outlines the concept of the separate spheres. It elaborated on the idea that the man's duty is to provide for the wife and family and navigate in the world, whilst it is the woman's responsibility to ensure the domestic background, be in charge of the household, to provide emotional support and to educate the children. In an ideal relationship of this sort, women's chores were valued, yet the husband still preserved his role as the head of the family (2001, 10). Murdoch recalls that this ideal of femininity was cemented by the poem "The Angel in the House" (1854) by Coventry Patmore, which put women on a pedestal, who were destined to be wives and to be devoted to their family. Yet, Murdoch also highlights that the binary division of the matters of life is an oversimplification, as women were preoccupied with matters beyond their homes through, for example, social causes. Though the idea of the New Woman emerged in the 1890s to challenge the *angel in the house* concept, in the middle of the century precursors of the feminist movement appeared. Women who participated in it argued that their contribution to society and politics could be achieved through their feminine characteristics (2013, Introduction). Contrarily to the common belief, Victorian women engaged in numerous activities: they were in charge of running the household, supervising domestic work and the servants, tending to the infants, the elderly and the sick; they were keen needleworkers and had philanthropic duties (Marsh 2001, 102).

The different attitudes to sexuality divided the Victorian mindset and had a profound impact on women's position in society. Fagence Cooper also highlights that protecting women from matters of sex was another sign of their respectability as the feeble feminine body needed perpetual protection as various theories about eroticism, how the female reproductive system worked, conception, or flouting the conventions permeated the Victorian way of thinking. Sexual innocence and chastity were highly valued and signified a well-ordered household, yet in reality, the situation was not that unambiguous. In contrast with the image of the respectable Victorian lady, there was not that much emphasis on morality among the lower classes; looser sexual relations were more common. Many women with seasonal jobs worked as prostitutes when they experienced financial difficulties. Though street

prostitution seemed to be the visible side of extramarital sexual activity, mistresses, models, actresses, barmaids, the so-called *fallen women* were also marginalised in a respectable society; the distinction between innocence and vice was difficult to circumscribe (2001, 12–30).

6 The Femininity of Juliet, Miranda and Vivien

Based on the detailed descriptive analyses of the photographs above, and the Victorian social context, one might argue that the first two themes bear a resemblance to each other. The concept of *the angel in the house*, a tender, subservient woman, who is confined to the domestic sphere, echoes Juliet's and Miranda's character. Juliet seeks guidance, Miranda gets acquainted with her father's past; both of them are rendered as figures of vulnerability and innocence in need of protection and guidance. Although by accepting the vial of poison (fig. 1) or saying farewell (fig. 2) to Friar Laurence, Juliet seems to embrace her fate to some extent, yet Miranda seems slightly more passive (figs. 3 and 4). Friar Laurence and Prospero are both paternal figures, while Juliet and Miranda are innocent young women dependent on them to a certain extent. As Fazio emphasises, while Friar Laurence appears to be a benevolent, wise guardian, Prospero, who binds his daughter to himself with his magic, is more controlling (2023, 121). As Fazio argues, the first version (fig. 1) might allude to the Friar as a gentle, yet rather paternalistic and dominating presence, as opposed to the second version (fig. 2), where, though the two figures appear on the same level, they seem more distant and less intimate. Despite touching each other, they rather seem to be saying goodbye (Fazio 2023, 118). It might be argued which handclasp seems more intimate: the closer one, but with the vial (fig. 1), or the more distant one (fig. 2) without the vial, yet with the figures gently holding each other's hands and bidding farewell. Their touch and the passing of the vial both mark a significant turning point in the play, as they initiate the series of events that lead to the tragic death of the star-crossed lovers, which ends the feud between the Houses of Montague and Capulet. The two photographs can be interpreted as illustrating consecutive moments in the scene: firstly, Juliet seeks guidance and is given the vial, then they bid farewell. Hence the difference in composition.

If we ignore the presence of the vial, it is somewhat difficult to distinguish the father–daughter duos in the four photographs (figs. 1–4). Mike Weaver argues that "Mrs. Cameron's men are, on the whole, authoritarian figures, compulsive and compelling in the manner of Carlyle's heroes" and the father figures are exploitative and dangerous to their children. He continues to claim that Cameron wilfully

operated with "the dark side of male authority," as she was sensitive and wise enough to identify darkness in great men (1986, 58). Rosen expresses an equally harsh opinion and echoes Weaver's idea, then he continues to claim that these allegories depict anti-heroes: "all of them involve harsh, severe, or callous father figures who have placed their virtuous and pure daughters in uncompromising predicaments, or whose overbearing and inflexible character stand in stark contrast to their daughter's kindness and compassion" (2017, 211). His position on the matter is that Friar Laurence is the agent of Romeo and Juliet's destruction, and he claims that Miranda is the "daughter shielded from the world as a reflection of her father's repressive control" (211). As mentioned earlier in the descriptions, Fazio's viewpoint is more permissive and lenient regarding the characters of Friar Laurence and Prospero. One might be inclined to resonate with her viewpoint, given the concept of the angel in the house: wise men being in charge, and pure, young girls turning to them for guidance and support resonate with the ideal of the *Zeitgeist*. The Shakespearean scenes – with their enclosed scenes within the domestic sphere, where women are aided by men – are in unison with the patriarchal *status quo.*

However, the character of Vivien suggests the stereotype of the dangerous *fallen woman*, who challenges the morals of her social environment: she is aware of her sexual power and deliberately utilises it to seduce and entrap the great wizard; there is no trace of an innocent young girl. Thus, by taking advantage of her attractiveness, she embraces her fate: the great wizard is the victim of Vivien's trickery, she is in the superior role. Here, as opposed to the original title of the poem, Cameron swapped the names in her title, thereby implying who dominates the scene: the young sorceress controls the old wizard, in a situation most inglorious for him. In contrast to Friar Laurence and Prospero, here it is the male figure, Merlin, who seems frail and vulnerable, with closed eyes, not emerging as the powerful wizard but as a victim of manipulation and deceit. Conversely, Vivien is the active party in her scene. The Tennysonian scenes are against the *status quo*, the established norms of society based on morality: not only are they dominated by the female figures, but also in the last photograph (fig. 6) an oak tree can be observed, alluding to the forest, a public sphere of action in sharp contrast to the Victorian ideal of female domesticity.

In the first two groups of photographs (figs. 1–4), the aged, wrinkled faces of Friar Laurence and Prospero attest to their wisdom, enhanced by the light cast on their forehead. Their faces are contrasted with the pure and youthful faces of Juliet and Miranda, respectively. Yet, the broken, old Merlin seems defeated as the determined Vivien is about to crawl on his lap (fig. 5) or is forcing him against the tree (fig. 6); there is nothing here to suggest his grandeur. The touch and the appearance of the characters' skin is another shared feature of the entire group of photos. The rugged and wrinkled skin of Friar Laurence, Prospero and Merlin is contrasted with the

soft, flawless skin of Juliet, Miranda and Vivien. However, a distinctive feature arises: in the case of Friar Laurence and Prospero, the aged skin might suggest wisdom, maturity, experience and dominance, as the respective plays contextualise them in the role of paternal figures. In contrast, Merlin's skin creates the impression of a frail, defeated man, who falls for Vivien's seduction, as Tennyson described. Juliet and Miranda have their youthful innocent beauty and charm, while Vivien, fully conscious of her appealing looks, is ready to defeat the magician mage by exerting her feminine charms. This might be another indicator of how the power relations shift between the different characters.

It can be observed that Cameron's photography is filled with creased drapery and conspicuous cascades of loose, long hair (Springer and Weiss 2023, 15); the photographs discussed here are spectacular examples of that feature. The wise men's long, white hair and bushy beards reinforce their masculinity, maturity and experience. While the braided and covered hair of Juliet implies modesty and purity, Miranda's hair flows down her back: as Fazio puts it, "she seems on the brink of flight from her overbearing father." She is "insolent yet redeemable, nevertheless remains subservient to her father, seemingly unable to escape the robes that entangle her despite her desire to assert herself" (2023, 121). Vivien's profusion of hair dominates the photograph where the characters are standing as she is seducing the wizard (fig. 6). These again echo the Victorian concept of femininity, loose hair partly suggests youth, purity, immaturity, while in the case of an adult woman, it suggests moral looseness.

7 Conclusion

The present paper has investigated three of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs inspired by scenes from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, together with their alternative versions: *Friar Laurence and Juliet*, *Prospero and Miranda* and *Vivien and Merlin*. Not only did Cameron harness the opportunities the medium of photography offered, but also she strove to ennoble photography by elevating it to the level of art. Creating literary allegories imbues her photographs with emotional and narrative depth and depicts the complexity of the relationship of the characters. The touch between an elderly man and a younger woman conveys different meanings: paternal guidance, support, control, dominance, and even seduction charged with sexual tension. The deliberate choice of composition, the lighting, the skin, the hair, all contribute to the depiction of power relations. Although all the photographs depict the leitmotif

of the encounter of an elderly man and a younger woman, if an attempt is made to construe the characters' relationships in the context of Victorian femininity, one might conclude that *Friar Laurence and Juliet* and *Prospero and Miranda* operate more or less the same way in that they echo the concept of the *angel in the house*, and show the power relations it entails (though by seeking guidance or using their own charms, the female characters depicted in Cameron's photographs embrace their fates to a certain extent). In contrast, *Vivien and Merlin*, especially the version with the standing characters (fig. 6), conjures up the image of the *fallen woman*, fully aware of her sexual powers, hence taking advantage of men. The deep meanings that these photographs convey immortalise Cameron's genius and sensitivity. As Weaver puts it, "[i]n her fusion of the tragic with the prophetic, the sinful with the pure, and the actual with the typical, she assured herself an immortality in the history of photography as certain as her hope in heaven" (1986, 58).

List of Illustrations

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