

*Julia Margaret Cameron: Photographs to electrify you with delight and startle the world* by Marta Weiss. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016. 188 pp. ISBN 9781910164297. £25.

In *Freshwater*, Virginia Woolf's madcap but always astute and genial satire of Julia Margaret Cameron and her circle, Cameron tries to transform Alfred Tennyson – too busy dandling the young Ellen Terry on his knee – into a photograph of “Poetry adoring the Muse.” In order to do so, Cameron needs a pair of wings. When a trunk full of props (“Towels, sheets, pajamas, trousers, dressing gowns, braces”) yields everything except the desired appendage, Cameron instructs her servant: “What d’you say, Mary. There are no wings! Then kill the turkey!” Quicker than Tennyson can charm Terry, Cameron returns, wings in hand. When the model protests, “I was so fond of that bird,” Cameron intones, “The turkey is happy, Ellen. The turkey has become part and parcel of my immortal art.” Woolf was clearly having fun with her great-aunt’s reputation for imperious behaviour and self-assurance, but the play as a whole implicitly asserts that Cameron was just as much an “artist” as the Poet Laureate or the painter George Frederick Watts. It is an assertion that informs and is confirmed by Marta Weiss’s superb volume, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Photographs to electrify you with delight and startle the world*. Originally the catalogue for a winter 2016 exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, the book stands on its own as a trove of images and a substantial academic storehouse.

Ideally, one should have at least two different kinds of close encounters with this book: one, the pleasure of studying Cameron’s photographs, which are beautifully reproduced, and the other, to benefit from Weiss’s scholarship. This is an eminently resourceful volume: wide-ranging in its discussion of Cameron, her network of friends and cultural associates, and Victorian photography, but usefully concentrating on the “remarkable relationship between Cameron and the South Kensington Museum” (now the V&A). Given the antipathy to women in the arts in that era, it was quite exceptional that the museum’s founding director, Sir Henry Cole (1808-82), not only supported Cameron’s endeavours and encouraged the purchase of her images, but in 1868 arranged for the museum to provide the use of two rooms for making portraits. Weiss, curator of photographs at the V & A, has organized the exhibition, the book’s long introductory essay, and the plates according to themes “drawn from one of Cameron’s letters to Cole.” Consequently, the interplay between photographer and museum director, artist and patron, exhibitor and administrator is highlighted, and Cameron’s professional development as well as her aesthetic commitments are also highlighted. Even those familiar with Cameron’s *oeuvre* might be surprised to learn that the V & A collection