

REIMAGINING A CRIME OF PASSION: THE VERTICALITY
OF ARCHITECTURAL RUINS IN MILLAIS'S
ILLUSTRATION FOR TENNYSON'S "THE SISTERS"

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An illustration that stands out visually in the 1857 illustrated edition of Alfred Tennyson's *Poems* (more commonly known as the "Moxon Tennyson," published by Edward Moxon),¹ is John Everett Millais's design for "The Sisters," converted into wood engraving by the Brothers Dalziel (fig. 1). At first sight, what attracts our attention is the picture's overwhelmingly dark tones, as well as the absence of human figures; indeed, the most prominent element is a rectangular tower, visible at close range. However, for viewers who are familiar with the poem's content, the illustration sparks curiosity and may even be considered as a baffling mystery. I focus here on two pictorial aspects that help explain this apparently idiosyncratic illustration in the Moxon Tennyson, namely the abundance of vertical lines in the picture and the role of architecture in generating meaning.

Subject matter aside, the tower contains a conspicuous vertical emphasis, not least the un-inked vertical and stepped engraving marks to the right of the depicted structure, and the darker lines defining the corners of the building. Following these nearly vertical lines, the viewer's eyes are directed upwards. In purely geometric terms, the illustration is characterised by a leading path guiding the eye from bottom to top. Bringing in the subject matter again, the structure resembles a turret – a small tower usually built on top of a medieval castle to provide a defensive position (Macaulay 12). From one of its sides, the platform can be reached via a set of steps consisting of uneven risers and threads. Perpendicular to the adjacent side, but not as tall as the turret, is a stone wall. The top margin of the design has been trimmed off, concealing the tip of the turret. Taken as a whole, the architecture occupies the largest portion of the pictorial space. In the lower right corner is a bright, flat, moonlit surface