

Research notes: "Quotes regarding the Daguerreotype"

(keywords: Abraham Bogardus, Harry L. A. Culmer, Edward Weston, Walt Whitman, Clarence Cook, Henry Hunt Snelling, Shade, "dag," history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

THE DAGUERREOTYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA

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Quotes regarding the Daguerreotype

This file serves as the gathering of various citations deemed of interest by the editor. These are research notes only and are not to be construed as complete, authoritative, or comprehensive. The editor may amend these notes at any time. The editor welcomes any comments or additional information on this topic

"Centenary of Dr. John William Draper, First Portrait Photographer," *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* (Boston) 48:654 (June 1911): 247–50.

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P9110001_DRAPER_WILSONS_1911-06.pdf

Those were the good old days! There has never been a photograph made since the time of the daguerreotype, in spite of all kinds of newfangled ways, that could equal the daguerreotype's exquisite beauty, delicate minuteness, and charm of color. The daguerreotype was made to last forever, and, what is more, it told the truth and nothing but the truth, no matter whether the truth consisted of freckles, a crooked nose or superfluous hair.

also:

I remember 'Brady's Famous National Gallery' as if it were yesterday when I got that old 'dag' taken.

"Mr. Bogardus Retires," *Sun* (New York) 55:75 (14 November 1887): 3.

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8870001_BOGARDUS_SUN_1887-11-14.pdf

(<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030272/1887-11-14/ed-1/>)

The daguerreotype was a fickle jade and turned rusty the minute the sun grew dim or was flirting with a cloud.

Photographic Notes: *Journal of the Birmingham Photographic Society* (Jersey) 2:31 (15 July 1857): 258.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=droaAAAAYAAJ>

ON TAKING AND PRINTING STEREOSCOPIC PICTURES.

[Paper read by Mr. James Ross, (of Messrs. Ross & Thomson), at the last Meeting of the Photographic Society of Scotland, and forwarded by him for insertion in this Journal.]

MR. CHAIRMAN.—I was in hopes that the Daguerreotype would have been the subject of this night's consideration, and as France was the place of its birth, a French Photographer I thought was to sing its requiem in this, the place of its burial. In no part in this country at least—has it lived so long as in our own cold climate, and for my part I think it should have “died hereafter,” when perchance its place might have been filled, if that were possible, by something more lovely still. Not only was it the first-born but far the most beautiful of the many branches of the Photographic family. It was indeed both “a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.” Whether this can at some future time be said of the hybrid style of Photography that has succeeded it time alone can tell.*

[clip. . .]

* If we understand Mr. Ross rightly, he admires the now nearly-exploded Daguerreotype process. So do we. There is no process, in our opinion, at all comparable to it for exquisite gradation of shade and microscopic perfection of detail.

[ED. P. N.]

Year-book of Photography and Photographic News Almanac 1889: p. 151 (This is from a snippet view from Google Books. Need complete citation information)

The Daguerreotype had a sparkle and delicacy peculiarly its own, and its permanence baa... But the Daguerreotype had its beginning and ending in itself.

Abraham Bogardus, “The Lost Arts,” *International Annual of Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (New York / London) (June 1889): 37–38.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=pWE1AAAAMAAJ>

The first mentioned is the good old daguerreotype, with its perfection, its beauty, its accuracy, and its prompt execution. It has never been excelled by any production of the camera. Like all of us, it had its faults, in fact, was full of *shines*, but with all its faults “I love thee still,” but alas, it is gone beyond resurrection.

GOOGLE_Inter-annual_Anthony_v2_1889_pWE1AAAAMAAJ.pdf

Analyst; a Quarterly Journal of Science, Literature, Natural History, and the Fine Arts (London) 10:30 (1840): 530.

under the heading:

OUTLINE OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE,
RELATING TO THE NATURAL SCIENCES & PHILOSOPHY.

(reviewing the following periodical):

The London and Edinburg Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science; conducted by Sir David Brewster, F. R. S. Richard Taylor, F.G.S. and Richard Phillips, F.G.S. 8vo, London, 1839

NOVEMBER— . . .

In a note to the Editors, Mr. Towson distinguishes the proper focus for the Daguerreotype,” a monkey-looking, horrid-sounding term for the art of photography: he explains this as an important fact which has hitherto escaped observation.

Harry L. A. Culmer, “Mountain Art,” *Overland Monthly* (San Francisco) 24:142 (October 1894): 345–346.

Good artists hate good photographs, where every object on the field is reproduced with wonderful distinctness; but will go into raptures over an under-timed one, in which the high lights break weirdly out from broad masses of shadow; or an over-timed one wherein light and atmosphere have saturated everything to grayness. In their weariness of the perfect photograph, we have even known them to suggest a return to the old daguerreotype, which does not tell all it knows at once.

Peter C. Bunnell, edit., *Edward Weston on Photography* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983): 44. Bunnell cites a source text, “Los Daguerreotipos,” *Forma* 1:1 (October 1926): 7.

DAGUERREOTYPES

They are documents, “family memories”, nothing more. They were made in the days before “artistic photographs,” and “light effects,” and theatrical “posing.” The photographers of daguerreotypes had not yet been classified “artists” sporting the classic floating tie and the rumpled and dirty hair. Fortunately the complicated work of silvering the sheets kept him busy. He was an artisan who dedicated himself to his work with simplicity and without ambiguities, without finding himself inhibited by the ambitions of his art. Because the technique of retouching was unknown, there was no way to make concessions to human vanity—the daguerreotypes were not lies. Although rigid, those photographs of our ancestors have a rigid dignity. Since the exposures lasted for minutes, they did not allow for calculated poses. In this manner we have inherited today the first epoch of photography, the most genuine, the most honest expression. An image chemically pure, strong and honest, and at the same time refined: the daguerreotype.

Walt Whitman (attrib.) "Visit to Plumbe's Gallery," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat* 5:160 (2 July 1846): n.p. (1st page of issue).

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8460001_WHITMAN_PLUMBE_DAILY_EAGLE_1846-07-02.pdf

There is always, to us, a strange fascination, in portraits. We love to dwell long upon them—to infer many things, from the text they preach—to pursue the current of thoughts running riot about them. It is singular what a peculiar influence is possessed by the *eye* of a well-painted miniature or portrait.—It has a sort of magnetism. We have miniatures in our possession, which we have often held, and gazed upon the eyes in them for the half-hour! An electric chain seems to vibrate, as it were, between our brain and him or her preserved there so well by the limner's cunning. Time, space, both are annihilated, and we identify the semblance with the reality.—And even more than that. For the strange fascination of looking at the eyes of a portrait, sometimes goes beyond what comes from the real orbs themselves

Shade (pseud.), "My First Daguerreotype," *The American Journal of Photography* Vol. 1, No. 16 (15 January 1859): 233–237.

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8590003_SHADE_FIRST-DAG_AM-JOURN-PHOT_1859-01-15.pdf

There never was anything like it. True, a multitude of "types" and "graphs" have been brought out since then, and glass and paper and iron and leather and divers vehicles have been covered with impressions, and I have seen them, but nothing ever filled my eye so completely as that first daguerreotype.

For hours I have held it, carefully noting all the soft minutiae of light and shade: and still the little rough-edged silver tablet was a joy forever, discovering some merit of complete similitude hitherto unnoted; it seemed inexhaustible, yielding new pleasure as often as consulted.

Sunlight Sketches' or the Photographic Textbook: A Practical Treatise on Photography (New York: H. H. Snelling, 1858): 25–27.

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8580005_SNELLING_SUN-SKETCH_1858.pdf

By this process when carefully managed, the time required in the camera is very short. With a well arranged light from 5 to 10 seconds is sufficient. Great precaution should be used, not to overtime. Remember the author is not advocating the *goneby* intense process which required three minutes time in the camera redeveloping with pyrogalic acid, one week and eight days to print from it. The process herein given produces the natural negative, one that will print in three minutes and give black for black, and white for white. It does not run into the scotch-snuff order. The proof is like the beautiful daguerreotype, developed and defined in all its parts, and beautiful as the light of heaven can make it.

O, sad fate of the beautiful daguerreotype! I would to heaven I could forget it. But it lingers in my soul like fond remembrance of a dear departed friend. Fifteen long years I revelled with it in its glory, and for four years past I have mournfully watched by its

dying couch, flattering myself with a hope of restoration, and yet it is constantly drugged and kept in state of suspense between life and death, by a class of vulgar-mouthed avaricious filibusters who have scarcely sense enough to make the cheap ambrotype much more the beautiful daguerreotype.

But so it must lie. Kings are mighty, but dollars are more mighty! I would not be greatly surprised to see the American mother bartering away her offspring for gold, or exchanging the smiling babe at her breast for a negro or a monkey. For such is the comparison between the daguerreotype and the ambrotype. Imagine for one moment; before you, stands two female figures, the one is a black wench and the other a beautiful white lady, and at the same time held in one hand is a daguerreotype, and in the other an ambrotype; the ambrotype is most distinct, it stands out the boldest, and so is the wench in looks and smell stronger than the white lady; but look again, and again, and if you finally decide that the wench is more beautiful than the white lady; or that the ambrotype compares in beauty with the daguerreotype, you are a fool and ought to be dispatched at once to Nicaragua as a boot-black to Captain Walker. You have mistaken your calling and have assumed a position for which nature has not fitted you, and are more contemptible and troublesome than a *dead ass* in the gateway. But you offer your wares cheap and fools buy them.

Clarence Cook, "Some Old-Fashion Things Worth Reviving," *Scribner's Monthly Illustrated Magazine* (New York) Vol. 22, No. 1 (May 1881) p. 149.

I have left myself no time to speak of some other old-fashioned things I wish might be revived besides stringed instruments. There is the daguerreotype, for one. How much more beautiful than any photograph were those silvery, refined pictures which were the first children of Daguerre's invention! I well remember the first one seen in this city, whether taken here or brought from Paris I do not now remember. It was brought to the office of my father, who all his life was interested in everything that concerned the minor arts, and there I saw it in company with many more, for, as may be supposed, it awakened great curiosity. I suppose the main reason why the daguerreotype was abandoned was the difficulty one had in seeing the pictures well. The silvered plate made itself a mirror, and you saw yourself when you wanted to see your friend. But, this defect apart, it is certainly true that the daguerreotype excelled the photograph in delicacy and transparency of the shadows and in the exquisite refinement of the lines, the best untouched photograph looking coarse beside a good daguerreotype. I believe that if some practitioner would take up the older process again there would be many who would like to have specimens of it, even if they did not prefer it altogether to the newer method. For children, the daguerreotype process is very desirable and something elusive and penetrating into the transparent depths with our eyes, gives movement and life to the image. There is nothing of this variety in the photography.

Richard Smith Elliott, *Notes Taken in Sixty Years* (St. Louis: R. P. Studley & Co., 1883): 204.

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8830001_ELLIOTT_SIXTY-YEARS_1883.pdf

But as to the old Daguerreotype process, I might say that it made a better picture than the photographic art can show, judging by my own likeness, taken in 1845 at Plumbe's gallery; for I defy any Photographer to make as handsome a picture of me now!

"Fine Arts: The New Art," *Literary Gazette; and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* (London) No. 1150 (2 February 1839): 72–74.
http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390017_NEW-ART_LIT-GAZETTE_1839-02-02.pdf

The French journals, and reports of proceedings, however, admit that these admirable representations still leave something to be desired as to effect, when regarded as works of art. It is singular, they observe, that the power which created them seems to have abandoned them; and that *these works of light want light*. Even in those parts the most lighted, there is an absence of vivacity and effect; and it is allowed, that amidst all the harmony of their forms, these views appear subjected to the sober and heavy tone of colour imparted by a dull northern sky. It would appear, that by passing through the glasses of the optical arrangement of M. Daguerre, all the views are uniformly clothed.

EDITOR'S NOTES: In its description of the daguerreotype's quality of imagery, this commentary does reflect some bias against Daguerre. Herschel, however, upon seeing Daguerre's pictures, wrote to Talbot, "It is hardly saying too much to call them miraculous."¹ Nonetheless, the commentator's phrase, "these works of light want light," is an apt description of many early daguerreotypes when compared to the later, brilliant examples of a matured process.

See also "Fine Arts: The Daguerrotype," *The Literary Gazette; and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* (London) No. 1182 (14 September 1839): 590.
http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390032_DAG_LIT-GAZ_1839-09-14.pdf

1. <http://www.foxtalbot.dmu.ac.uk/letters/docno.php?number=3875>

[End of texts.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The editor would welcome any comments and contributions regarding this topic

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