

**William H. C. Hosmer, "To Helena," (poem) 1854**

(keywords: William H. C. Hosmer, Gabriel Harrison, Helena, Helia, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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The poem appears under the section, "Sonnets."

## TO HELENA.

ON SEEING A DAGUERRETYPE BY GABRIEL HARRISON, REPRESENTING "HELENA"  
AS THE GODDESS OF THE ART.

WELL may the sun be sire of one like thee,  
Impersonation of celestial grace!  
Less of divine and bright was in the face  
Of new-born Venus rising from the sea.  
Daughter of Light! upon thy breast appears  
A star less radiant than thy lifted gaze  
That seems to pierce the distance veiled in haze,  
And read the riddle of the coming years.  
The musing bard, in inspiration's hour.  
A glimpse of nobler features never caught—  
Blending the charm of deep, prophetic thought  
With beauty's wild and overmastering power.  
Fair pictures crowd the galleries of old,  
But boast no shape of such a lustrous mould.

[End of text.]

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**EDITOR'S NOTES:**

In prior appearances of this poem, the name used was "Helia" rather than "Helena." See "To Helia," *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 6:5 (November 1853): 322.<sup>1</sup>

The reference is to the pictorial composition by Harrison entered in the Anthony Prize competition, "Helia, or the Genius of Daguerreotyping."

Harrison himself provided a description of the work:

### HELIA, OR THE GENIUS OF DAGUERREOTYPING.

This superb portraiture of a young lady is intended to represent the ideal character of HELIA as drawn by myself some time since, in a story bearing that name, and published in the columns of the *Photographic Art-Journal*. The *tout ensemble* of this picture is as near perfection as art can at this time boast of attaining. The rich, massive folds of the drapery, relieved by the brilliant star upon the bosom (emblematical of that

pure hope we all seek in the bright vista of an unknown future) is worth a rigid examination [examination—ed.]. At her approach, radiant with loveliness, the sitting sun upon her right veils its face, as though prompt to acknowledge her superhuman loveliness, while she, the gentle Helia, innocent, spotless and pure, seems an embodiment of all that is graceful and lovely—a type of that beauty that is the day-star of our hope, the realization of our brightest visions of the future.<sup>2</sup>

Additional information regarding Harrison (1818–1902) is found in S. J. Burr, “Gabriel Harrison and the Daguerrean Art,” *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 1:3 (March 1851): 169–77;<sup>3</sup> Grant Romer, “Gabriel Harrison: the Poetic Daguerrean,” *Image: Journal of Photography and Motion Pictures of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House* (Rochester) 22:3 (September 1979): 8–18.<sup>4</sup>

1. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8530014\\_HOSMER\\_TO-HELIA\\_1853-11.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8530014_HOSMER_TO-HELIA_1853-11.pdf)
2. “The Anthony Prize Pitcher,” *Photographic and Fine Art Journal* (New York) 7:1 (January 1854): 9. The reference to a previous article “published in the columns of the Photographic Art-Journal” is the allegorical fantasy, George Harrison, “Lights and Shadows of Daguerrean Life, No. 2,” *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 1:4 (April 1851): 229–32.
3. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510012\\_HARRISON\\_PAJ\\_1851-03.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510012_HARRISON_PAJ_1851-03.pdf)
4. [http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH\\_1979\\_22\\_03.pdf](http://image.eastmanhouse.org/files/GEH_1979_22_03.pdf)

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