FROM VERSE TO VISUAL: AN ANALYSIS OF ALFRED TENNYSON AND
WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT’S THE LADY OF SHALOTT

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From Verse to Visual: An Analysis of Alfred Tennyson and William Holman Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* (66pp)

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This paper addresses an issue of artistic interpretation in the dispute of Pre Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt’s illustration of Alfred Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott* in his 1857 book of illustrated poems. Both Tennyson and Hunt’s backgrounds are examined to gain a better understanding of the ideals that influenced their lives and inspired their works. Hunt’s illustration of *The Lady of Shalott*, done in 1857 for Tennyson, is looked at in relation to Tennyson’s disapproval of additional elements not included in the text and how he felt they affected his work. In addition, Hunt’s progression of thought is followed through a detailed study of his use of Typological Symbolism as he continues to develop his illustration, culminating in a painting that transforms Tennyson’s tragic fate of a young woman into a sermon on the duty of devotion to God and redemption.

Approved:

Jody Lamb

Associate Professor of Art History
To my Grandfather Wilber Bolen, whose own love of history affected me and led me to this point.
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Introduction

During the 19th century Victorians displayed an immense fondness for both ancient mythology and medieval legends. Large numbers of illustrators, painters, historians, novelists and poets enjoyed considerable success in meeting the demand for these subjects, appealing to a broad and enthusiastic public. Illustrated books, while hardly a new concept, were particularly popular during this period. This combination of visual arts and literature allowed people to gain a better understanding of their favorite characters and subject matter.

One of the most successful writers during the 19th century was Alfred Tennyson, and his poem “The Lady of Shalott” was one of the best known during this period. The subject matter, featuring the tragic fate of a young woman set against the backdrop of medieval Camelot, proved to be very popular with artists and illustrators. The popularity of his work prompted his publisher, Edward Moxon, to call for an illustrated edition of his work in 1854. Artist William Holman Hunt had already independently worked on a drawing of The Lady of Shalott, (fig. 1) and when Tennyson requested an illustration from him for this new edition it was an opportunity that Hunt gladly embraced. When fellow artist and friend Dante Gabriel Rossetti complained that Hunt had chosen his favorite image Hunt responded, “You know I made a drawing from this poem of the
Figure 1: William Holman Hunt
The Lady of Shalott 1850
Figure 2: Samuel Laurence
Alfred Tennyson 1840
‘Breaking of the Web’ at least four years ago...I have ever since been nervous lest this
immature invention should be regarded as my finished ideas.”

As with any illustration of a writer’s work, visual artists risked not being able, or
not desiring, to accurately portray a character in the context that Tennyson constructed it.
Disagreements between writer and illustrator were not uncommon and these interactions
are significant today for what they reveal about the period and individuals involved. The
most notable conflict in conjunction with the 1857 edition of Tennyson’s work involved
William Holman Hunt’s depiction of “The Lady of Shalott.” Upon meeting Hunt after
the drawing had been published, Tennyson asked, “Why did you make the Lady of
Shalott, in the illustration, with her hair wildly tossed about as if by a Tornado?”
Hunt replied that he was simply trying to convey the impression of her weird fate. To which
Tennyson responded, “An illustrator ought never add anything to what he finds in the
text.”

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3 Ibid, 125.
4 The Origins of “The Lady of Shalott”

“The Lady of Shalott” has had and still retains an appeal that attracts writers and artists. Part of
this allure started long before Tennyson began to create her mystical existence. It begins with the origins of
the mysterious Camelot that served as part of the background of the Lady’s drama. In the poem “The Lady
of Shalott,” Alfred Tennyson creates an enchanting world based on the mystery of a lonely lady and a
mysterious curse that haunts her. While the specific circumstances that surround her may be the creation of
Tennyson’s mind, the character already existed. Where did the story come from? Tennyson’s source is an
unusual one, but it came from an obvious origin, the legends of King Arthur.
The Arthurian legends are a mixture of mythology with a scattering of actual fact from Celtic history. The
earliest appearance of the legend comes from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae. Written in 1185 CE., Monmouth was fulfilling the wish of Geoffrey Plantagenet to “provide the Anglo-
Norman sovereigns with a reference point and worthy model.” (Anne Berthelot, King Arthur and the
Knights of the Round Table (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1997) 36.) Queen Guinevere and Sir
Lancelot first appeared later in that same century when Marie de Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of
Aquitaine, commissioned Le Chevalier de La Charrette, the first novel to describe the love triangle of King
Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Lancelot. (Berthelot, 36.) The connection between French and English courts allowed French literature to maintain a very close connection to the legends of Arthur. The French romances known as the Vulgate cycle consist of the tales of Arthur, Merlin, the Holy Grail, and Lancelot. It is from these key sources that the English writer of Arthurian legends, Thomas Malory, wrote his book *Le Morte d’Arthur* in 1529. While those familiar with Malory’s work, especially the character Elaine of Astolat, might be convinced that his writings were the inspiration for Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott,” Tennyson claimed otherwise. He did admit to their accidental similarity, stating “The Lady of Shalott” is evidently the Elaine of the *Morte d’Arthur*, but I do not think that I had ever heard of the latter when I wrote the former.” (George O. Marshall, *A Tennyson Handbook* (New York: Twanye Publishers, 1963) 59.) In a conversation with his friend F. J. Furnivall, Tennyson denied any intent to pattern the work of Malory. Writing to William Rossetti, Furnivall quoted an earlier conversation with Tennyson, writing “Indeed I doubt whether I should ever have put it in that shape if I had been aware of the Maid of Astolat in *Morte d’Arthur*.” (Marshall, 59.) Tennyson’s inspiration actually came from a most unlikely and obscure source, an Italian novella entitled “La Donna di Scalotta.” Tennyson’s son Hallam writes about this Italian source in his father’s memoirs. Recounting the works contained in the 1832 volume of poems, he writes, “Among the poems in this volume were “the Lady of Shalott” (so-called from an Italian novelette, “Donna di Scalotta”)…” (Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* vol. 1 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1911) 91.)

The novella “La Donna di Scalotta” comes from a collection of Italian short stories commonly known as *Il Novellino, Cento Novelle Antiche*, or *One Hundred Ancient Tales*. While some of the tales are themselves much older, scholars suggest 1281 CE to 1300 CE as the date of the original compilation. *Il Novellino*, writes Joseph Consoli, was the “First collection of short stories to appear in Italian literature composed specifically for Italian audiences.” (Joseph P. Consoli, *The Novellino or One Hundred Ancient Tales* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997) xi.) While it may have been written specifically for an Italian audience, the stories did not come solely from Italian writers. *Il Novellino* is a collection of tales that originate from various countries. Included in this collection are stories from the Orient, French nouvelles, Provençal vidas, the crusades, the Bible, and romances of the Round Table. Because no original source remains, readers past and present must rely on the arrangement by Carlo Gualteruzzi completed in 1525. His script and its “twin” in the Vatican are the only remaining records scholars have of the full one hundred tales. (Consoli, xi.)

Without an original manuscript, identifying who wrote “La Donna di Scalotta” and the other tales within *Il Novellino* is difficult. It is likely that more than one author was involved in the process of writing the stories. It is possible that Burnetto Latini, master of Dante Alighieri, wrote the novellas that refer to Arthurian legends. Latini is thought to have owned a copy of the romances of the round table. (Thomas Roscoe, *The Italian Novelist* (London: Fredrick Warne and Co., 19--?) 4.) He is also credited as being the person who brought French literature to Italy. (Paul Legasse, ed., *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2000) 1591.)

Depending on what edition of *Il Novellino* one reads, the novella of the Lady of Scalot is number eighty-one or eighty-two. The novella tells the story of the daughter of the Great Babassoro, the Lady of Scalot, who falls in love with Lancelot of the Lake. Closer in similarity to Malory’s Elaine than Tennyson’s Lady, Lancelot does not return her love because he already loves Queen Ginevra. Because of her “unhealthy attachment” the Lady of Scalot at length falls victim to it and dies. (Roscoe, 19.) Until this moment in the story the similarities between Tennyson’s work and the novella are in two characters, the Lady of Scalot and Sir Lancelot. A more conclusive connection is found in the description of the Lady after her fate is sealed. In the novella the writer describes the lady’s request upon her death:

> “…her body should be transported on board a barge fitted up for the purpose, with a rich couch and adorned with velvet stuffs and precious stones and ornaments; and thus arrayed in her proudest attire, with a bright golden crown upon her brows…” (Roscoe, 19.)
Tennyson and the Development of “The Lady of Shalott”

Alfred Tennyson’s (fig. 2) career as a poet “was followed closely from the start by sanguine friends who never failed to extend to him their enthusiastic admiration and encouragement…”5 Pleasantly encouraged by the reception of Tennyson’s first solo volume, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*, he was urged by his closest friend, Arthur Hallam, to produce a second volume of work. Bolstered by their support and the confidence of his

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In his original 1832 poem, Tennyson follows the same details of the novella in lines 33 - 35, “A pearl garland winds her head/ She leaneth on a velvet bed/ Full royally appareled.” (Alfred Tennyson, *Poems 1833* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832) 10.) If this were not enough of a parallel the final lines of the original poem once again refer to details found within the novella. Tennyson writes in line 174 “There lay a parchment on her breast…” (A.Tennyson, 19.) In the novella the author makes a similar reference, writing “…her body richly cinched with a purse attached. And in this purse there was a letter…” (Consoli, 109.) In both the novella and Tennyson’s poem this letter recounts to the reader and the people of Camelot the cause of the Lady’s death. As similar as Tennyson’s Lady may be to Malory’s Elaine of Asolat, the similarities in details and wording verify that *Il Novellino*, not *Le Morte d’Arthur*, was the inspiration for Tennyson’s work.

In *Il Novellino* the story of “La Donna di Scalotta” is a simple one. The reader knows exactly who the Lady is, where she comes from and why and how she dies. Because of the brevity and lack of background contained in “La Donna di Scarlotta,” Tennyson has allowed himself and the reader more freedom in the evolution of “The Lady of Shalott.” In his development of the tale, facts are few and consequently the Lady is more mysterious. The setting is the island of Shalott, which stands in the middle of a river running down to the town of Camelot. Exactly who the Lady is and why and how she has come to be there is never revealed to the reader. The only hint of her presence to her surrounding neighbors is her singing. In line 26 the reaper in the field refers to her as a fairy. (A. Tennyson, 9.)

In her confinement the Lady weaves the daily scenes that pass by her abode. Due to an unexplained curse, the only way she can proceeds in her work is by looking indirectly at the view from a mirror rather than her window. What should happen if she breaks this curse is not known to reader or heroine. One day she is drawn by the flamboyant character of Lancelot, causing her to momentarily forget the curse as she turns for a closer look. Even though the repercussions of looking out the window have been unclear, she realizes the second she looks what she has done. To remove any doubt that some fatal error has been made, the mirror cracks and her weavings unravel, reinforcing the consequences of her actions. Why she eventually breaks the curse is understandable; she is tired of watching rather then participating in the outside world. Somehow the Lady quickly grasps that the consequences of her action is death, and she quickly heads for a boat which is to be her final resting place. Knowing that no one has any knowledge of who she is, she paints her name on the prow, floating towards Camelot and her death. (A.Tennyson, 16.)
new publisher, Edward Moxon, *Poems 1833*, which included the “Lady of Shalott,” was released in December of 1832. Another friend, Edward Fitzgerald, stated that this second publication created much more of an impression then earlier publications, as it revealed “Tennyson the person.”⁶ Despite the great faith that Arthur, his friends and publisher had in his new work, critical reception was lukewarm at best. Typical was the response from an anonymous critic for *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, who stated that this new volume hardly measured up to the expectation created by the author of *Poems Chiefly Lyrical*.⁷

As indifferent as some critics were to Tennyson’s new work, the harshest criticism of the book, including the “The Lady of Shalott,” came from J.W. Crocker for the Quarterly Review. Crocker voiced numerous complaints. He went so far as to write a mocking parody of “The Lady of Shalott,” referring to the Lady as a spinster with a pathetic fate.⁸ Distressed by criticism of his work, ten years passed before any new poems were to appear in print. Those years were not idle, rather much time was given to polishing his writing as well as reviving his previous poems. As a result, “The Lady of Shalott” reappeared in 1842, with many altered lines and a new ending. Reception of these revised and expanded verses at least secured Tennyson’s reputation, a reputation that from this point would grow with each subsequent publication. Moxon was so encouraged by Tennyson’s suddenly growing fame and potential for profit, that he decided to offer a deluxe edition of his work that would offer the best of Tennyson’s...  

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poetry to date, handsomely bound and enriched with illustrations by the best artists of the
day.

The illustrated edition that Moxon conceived of in 1854 was met with little
enthusiasm on Tennyson’s part. Rather, he preferred the simple, yet tasteful,
arrangement of his previous publications. More to the point he generally disliked
illustrations of his work, as “they never seemed to him to illustrate his own ideas.”
Despite these misgivings Tennyson allowed Edward Moxon to proceed with plans for
this new publication, primarily because he needed the money to purchase a new home.
As no new work was to be included in this edition, Tennyson left most of the planning to
his editor. Moxon’s choices for illustrators included such established artists as Edwin
Landseer, Daniel Maclise, Benjamin Creswick, and William Mulready. In addition, three
young artists, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante
Gabriel Rossetti were also asked to make contributions. Their work and ideals had earlier
impressed Tennyson, and in turn they had long held his poetry in high regard. His new
book provided them with the perfect venue to display their art.

William Holman Hunt and the Principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, along with four
other like minded individuals, joined in 1848 with the common goal of preserving the
artistic identity of England as well as avoiding “all that was conventional in

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9 Ibid, 100-1.
10 Jack T. Harris, “The Pre-Raphaelites and the Moxon Tennyson,” The Pre-Raphaelite Journal 3:2
Figure 3: William Holman Hunt
John Everett Millais 1853

Figure 4: John Everett Millais
William Holman Hunt 1854

Figure 5: William Holman Hunt
Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1853
contemporary art."\(^{11}\) Their motivation lay in the belief that in the centuries following Raphael the progression of design had become stagnated by well meaning artists who continued to imitate, rather than expand upon the knowledge they had gained from previous masters. The group called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood or the P.R.B. in hopes of reviving the ideals, techniques and processes of artists before Raphael. The writings and instructions of artist, critic, and writer John Ruskin, especially from his series *Modern Painters,* particularly influenced the philosophy of this group. In his book *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin,* George Landow set forth three criteria that Ruskin felt poets and painters needed in order to insure that an appropriate aesthetic reaction took place. These were absolute sincerity of the artist and his work, intensity of aesthetic experience, and originality.\(^{12}\) While the Brotherhood could not deny that there was much to be learned from the great masters of the past, it was these three criteria that they had clearly missed and that the P.R.B. aimed to attain.

They were especially impressed by Ruskin’s appeal to contemporary artists to “go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and rejoicing always in the truth.”\(^{13}\) In this context nature meant much more than what is seen outdoors. Nature was also a reference to the purity of subject and color, and foremost truth to the nature of one’s self. In observing these beliefs it was most important that the artist did not aim for the absolute actuality of detail in nature, but rather the complete faithfulness to the

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\(^{11}\) Hunt, 1: 125.  
impression one received when working directly from it. This ‘Truth in Nature’ became a goal that the Brotherhood aspired to in their work, in their belief emulating the goals of artists working before the time of Raphael. In addition to nature, the group almost exclusively found their inspiration for subjects in the medieval and romantic narratives of author’s past and present. The brotherhood applied these beliefs to their own work in hopes of reviving “a style worthy of the wholesome English tradition.”14.

Of the founding members John Ruskin’s ideas had the most profound affect on William Holman Hunt. He told fellow member John Millais:

“Lately I had great delight in skimming over a certain book, *Modern Painters*, by a writer calling himself an Oxford graduate; it was lent to me only for a few hours, but, by Jove! passages in it made my heart thrill. He feels the power and responsibility of art more than any author I have read.”15

Originally begun as a defense of the work of J.M.W. Turner, *Modern Painters* quickly was perceived as a call for the revitalization of art, providing the criteria to do so. Great art, according to Ruskin, depended upon representation of faithful observation by the artist and the influence that its audience had upon the masses. However, for Hunt possibly the most appealing aspect of Ruskin’s ideology was the concept of the artist’s responsibility in revealing evidence of God and furthering his divine plan through art.16

From an early age Hunt had felt the “power and responsibility” of art upon him; although discouraged by his father in his chosen profession he was never deterred from his chosen

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15 Hunt, 1:90.
Figure 6: Sidney Harold Meteyard

‘I am Half-Sick of Shadows’
said The Lady of Shalott 1913

Figure 7: John William Waterhouse
The Lady of Shalott 1894
Figure 8: John William Waterhouse
*The Lady of Shalott* 1888
Figure 9: William A. Breakspeare

*The Lady of Shalott* (undated)
Figure 10: Dante Gabriel Rossetti
“The Lady of Shalott” *Poems.*
London: E. Moxon, 1857
path and worked on his own to develop his talent. The declarations found in John
Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* were a confirmation and inspiration to Hunt’s purpose in both
art and life.

**The Artistic Lure of the Lady and Her Meaning**

While some of the artists were attracted to the romantic subject matter of
Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott,” others, including William Holman Hunt, were drawn to
the underlying moral message. Many of the Pre-Raphaelites, along with other Victorian
artists, created at least one version of the “Lady of Shalott” in their lifetime. Five aspects
of the poem emerged as the most popular for illustration: “1.) the Lady by a window, (fig.
6) 2.) the moment of catastrophe, (fig. 7) 3.) the Lady leaving her island, (fig. 8) 4.) the
Lady dying as she floats towards Camelot, (fig. 9) and 5.) the dead Lady in her boat
floating on the river.” (fig. 10)\(^{17}\) Hunt and his colleagues particularly enjoyed the
challenge of determining appropriate illustrations for this poem. Understanding the
importance of who she was and what she represented was a complex issue that appealed
to and challenged both contemporary illustrators and readers.

Much was and still is read into the significance of the meanings that Tennyson
wished to imply in his poem. Modern theories often suggest that the Lady was a
representation of society’s opinion of the Victorian woman, her sexuality and her role
within society. While this theory addresses valid points, Tennyson offered some
clarification during his lifetime. Hallam Tennyson stated that his father said the key to
understanding the poem lay in the four lines;

“Or when the moon was overhead
Came two lovers lately wed;
“I am half sick of shadows,” said
The Lady of Shalott.”

Tennyson himself explained this pivotal text, stating that they were meant to express
“The new-born love for something, for someone in the whole wide world from which she
has been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities.”
His concern lay not in the sexuality of women but rather in the dangers of one who lives a
life of isolation within a world of fantasy rather then reality.

The issue of the perils of artistic isolation were also addressed in Tennyson’s
poem “The Palace of Art,” which was also included in Poems 1833. In this poem a
woman representing the artistic soul voluntarily isolates herself in a palace of artistic
splendor. As with the Lady, solitude is enjoyed for a time until she begins to realize that
the choice of total isolation is a curse rather then a blessing. Both the Lady and the
anonymous individual in the “The Palace of Art” represent the struggle an artist faces
between how the artist is to retain pure ideals whilst living within the demands of society.
However, the outcomes differ. In The Palace the narrator is able to escape his/her fate by
learning from the lessons provided by the experience. The Lady is not so lucky for
reasons not shared with the reader; her fate was determined and sealed from the
beginning.

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18 Alfred Tennyson, Poems 1833 (London: Edward Moxon, 1832) 12.
The Illustrated Edition of 1857

In 1850, four years before Tennyson requested that Hunt illustrate his book, the artist had already begun to explore the subject of the *Lady of Shalott* (fig. 1). His pictorial study of this time differed greatly from the final product of 1905, or even the illustration of 1857. While from start to finish Hunt’s main focus was always the “moment of realization,” his first attempt also included fragments of other key moments in the poem. These were represented by a series of smaller mirrors that encompassed the larger one to provide the viewer with the knowledge needed to understand how the Lady came to her realization and what transpires after. The mirrors with their reflections of the outside world were an inspiration from Jan van Eyck’s *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini*, (figure 11) a Northern Renaissance artist whose work the Brotherhood long admired and whose work was readily available for study at the National Gallery in London.20 At the top is a tower and wall representing Camelot, the town that plays a central role in the life and death of the Lady. Working clock-wise the next three scenes depict the Lady working at her loom, looking out the window at Lancelot, and Lancelot himself. This leads to the central mirror and its reflection of the moment of catastrophe, with Lancelot riding away unaware of what he has just set in motion. On the left side of the image the tale continues as these mirrors picture the lady preparing the boat for her death, floating towards Camelot, and Lancelot’s discovery of her.

Figure 11: Jan van Eyck

*The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini* 1434
Figure 12: William Holman Hunt
Study for The Lady of Shalott 1857

Figure 13: William Holman Hunt
Figure 14: Charles Robinson
*The Lady of Shalott* (undated)

Figure 15: William Holman Hunt
*The Lady of Shalott* (undated)
Tennyson’s request gave Hunt an opportunity to once again work on “The Lady of Shalott.” In the early stages of development Hunt experimented with the Lady’s pose, portraying her sitting, then kneeling, all the while attempting to keep her head in proper relation to the mirror (fig. 12), so that the connection could be made at the appropriate moment. In the end Hunt decided to leave the Lady standing (fig. 13) as in the previous drawing. While the Lady always remained in relation to the mirror whether sitting or kneeling, placing her fully upright added to the desired climactic outcome.

The differences in effect can be seen very clearly by comparing the image to one created by Charles Robinson. (fig. 14) In Robinson’s image the moment chosen for illustration is the same, but seated the impact is far less dramatic. Bringing the Lady directly to the foreground of the drawing ensured that while there were ensuing circumstances she is the main figure to focus upon. The viewer gets a full sense of her conflict because she is standing. Her body bends (fig. 15) and her arms wrestle to break free of the threads that whirl up to trap her. While her body is fighting to break free of her fate her head seems to accept it as it bows remorsefully, knowing the predicament she faces is of her own making. Her hair completes the foreground frame as it blows wildly about, framing the image reinforcing the reality that she was and still is trapped by the circumstance she has seemingly had all of her life.

The large loom, where the Lady has spent all of her waking hours weaving the scenes that pass by, also encloses her. The mirror itself reveals the cause of the Lady’s downfall. In its reflection you can see the ensuing catastrophe as the unaware Lancelot rides towards the distant Camelot. For the first time, this illustration includes typological
symbolism to assist in explaining the scene pictured. (fig.13) The practice of adding elements to a painting to assist in a deeper definition of the subject was not a new one. Heavy use of this method could be found in the work of Medieval and Renaissance artists, as well as from other periods. In reintroducing this method, Hunt hoped to “create an art that could marry realism and elaborate iconography, fact and feeling, matter and spirit.”

Hunt was faced with a major challenge by using this approach. Symbols that once had clear meanings to a Medieval or Renaissance audience would be little understood by his contemporaries.

In his published illustration of _The Lady of Shalott_, Hunt introduces the figure of Christ on the cross to the right of the mirror. Hunt fully believed in Ruskin’s theory that the artist and his art must offer not only a picture, but also a deeper message, preferably one that helped to reveal God’s goodness and divine plan. In this drawing Hunt has attempted to interpret the deeper moral message hidden below the surface of the image. According to Landow, “The figures of Christ and Lancelot embody the alternatives for art, defined here in a moral opposition far more absolute than in the poem.”

Just as any good Christian must daily choose between good and evil in his life, the good artist must choose between accomplishing work that has no real value or art that furthered the greater good of mankind. Therefore if an artist must separate oneself from outside influences to keep their art uncorrupted, then it is surely for the best. By making this connection Hunt altered Tennyson’s original message or intentions.

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Hunt’s illustration of the *Lady of Shalott*, along with the work of seven other artists, were released to the public in May of 1857. Unfortunately, the success of this illustrated publication was not the financial success that Edward Moxon had hoped and intended it to be. This was due in part to a delay of publication. Moxon had originally hoped the book would be available in December of 1856, just in time for Christmas, but due to the procrastination of Dante Gabriel Rossetti this was not to be. The drawings themselves also surely played a role in the book’s failure. The general feeling was that while many were fine pieces of work, they hindered rather than enhanced the work. Regarding the illustrations, a reviewer of the *Art Journal* declared “we are much inclined to doubt whether their aid will be generally considered to have given much additional value to the volume.”

Tennyson too was not happy with the drawings included in this edition. As he had predicted, many of the drawings fell short of illustrating the text he had written. Little mention is made of specific drawings that dissatisfied him outside of those done by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Of the works contributed by the Brotherhood Tennyson found fault with at least two of the seven illustrations William Holman Hunt had contributed to the publication, as well as work by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Soon after the publication of the illustrated edition Hunt had an opportunity to meet with Tennyson. It was at this time that Tennyson questioned him on the work he had contributed. During their discussion Tennyson was quick to point out that in “The Beggar Maid” he wrote simply that King Cophetua had “stepped down”, rather than taken a flight of stairs as

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Figure 16: William Holman Hunt
“King Copeteua,” Poems,
London: E. Moxon, 1857

Figure 17: J.C. Horsely
“Circumstances” Poems,
London: E. Moxon, 1857
Hunt had pictured.  

This is not to say that Tennyson was completely unhappy with all the work included in this volume. Artist J.C. Horsley later recalled hearing that Tennyson was greatly pleased with the works he contributed to accompany “Circumstances” (fig. 17) and “The May Queen.” (fig. 18)  

While he questioned Dante Rossetti’s drawing of St. Cecila for “The Palace of Art,” his illustration of “Mythic Uther’s Deeply-Wounded Son,” (fig. 19) for the same poem, was another that Tennyson favored.  

Hunt’s illustration for the “Lady of Shalott” (fig. 13) seems to have caused Tennyson the most annoyance. He took issue with the way in which the threads of the weaving flew about, wrapping around the Lady’s body. He also questioned the way in which Hunt rendered the Lady’s hair wildly flying about. Hunt replied, “I had wished to convey the idea of the threatened fatality by reversing the ordinary peace of the room and of the Lady herself; that while she recognized that the moment of the catastrophe had come, the spectator might also understand it.”  

Hunt defended this and other modifications by arguing, “May I not urge that I had only half a page on which to convey the impression of weird fate, whereas you use about fifteen pages to give expression to the complete idea?” A fair argument, but his reasoning was to no avail, as Tennyson stood strong in his belief that an illustrator should never take such liberties in adjusting an

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24 Hunt, 2:125.
26 Harris, 31.
28 Ibid, 2:125.
Figure 18: J.C. Horsely

Figure 19: Dante Gabriel Rossetti
“Mystic Uther’s Deeply Wounded Son,” Poems London: Edward Moxon, 1857
Although Tennyson was displeased with the book as a whole, understanding his acceptance of some works over others lies in the reply that Tennyson made to Hunt’s above mentioned argument; “an illustrator ought never to add anything to what he finds in the text.”

The three drawings mentioned that found Tennyson’s favor all illustrate the exact words of the poems, nothing is added or detracted from verse to image. Tennyson never asked Hunt to illustrate that particular portion of the poem. Each artist was given free reign to choose what they wished, with no specific instructions from Tennyson whatsoever. As William Rossetti later recalled, the artists were to work on their own with no comment from Tennyson. They were to use “Their own interpretations of the poems,” following their own inspiration. Why would Tennyson, who had told his editor that illustrations never seemed to satisfactorily illustrate his own ideas, neglect to offer guidance in order to insure that the outcome would meet his satisfaction?

Without his involvement, the fact that some of the illustrations would inevitably not meet his expectations should have come as no surprise.

In the end, Tennyson’s dissatisfaction could not have been entirely due to Hunt’s physical renderings of *The Lady of Shalott*. As an artist, it was his duty to add additional information that would aid the viewer in making the transition from verse to the visual. What may well have troubled him more were the moral ideas that Hunt alluded to in his use of typological symbolism. Whether or not Hunt realized it, his additional details changed the meaning of the poem. For Tennyson that meaning had seemed to be the idea

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29 Ibid, 2:125.
30 Hunt, 2:125.
that artists cannot allow duty to their art to entirely consume every aspect of their life, interaction is essential as it offered inspiration. Both men found something in the process of creation that had a great influence upon them. We know what Tennyson’s intentions were for the message he wished to convey, but what Hunt came to comprehend was different. This alternate view led him to continue developing the subject, and while the principal figure was the same, the visual outcome would be entirely different from Tennyson’s verse.

**Typological Symbolism in *The Lady of Shalott***

So what was it that Hunt saw that led him to conflict with the ideals of Tennyson’s poem? In a pamphlet available at the Arthur Tooth & Sons Gallery where the finished painting hung in 1905, Hunt voiced the concern that he felt. He wrote, “The progressive stages of circumstance in the poem are reached in such enchanting fashion as to veil from the casual reader the severer philosophic purport of the symbolism throughout the verse.”³² As one who adhered to the belief that it was the artist’s duty to help the viewer be more observant and gain deeper understanding, naturally he was duty bound to lift that veil from viewer’s eyes. In 1887 Hunt began to paint what would become the finished painting that now hangs at the Wadsworth Anthenum in Hartford, Connecticut (fig. 20). However, taking the account of *Lady of Shalott* and incorporating a complex web of typological symbols based on spiritual, mythological, philosophical, and historical genres, Hunt first needed to work out his idea on a smaller canvas. This oil sketch begun a year earlier in 1886 and which now hangs at the Manchester City Art

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Figure 20: William Holman Hunt
The Lady of Shalott 1886-1905
Figure 21: William Holman Hunt
The Lady of Shallot 1886-1905
Galleries (fig. 21) provides us with an idea of how Hunt worked out his program so as to provoke a response that went beyond the surface of the canvas.

As with the illustration for Tennyson’s 1857 book of illustrated poems, the overall composition of the painting is very similar. Yet, the addition of a complete typological program required Hunt to extend the space in the room that was once dominated by the figure of the Lady. In expanding this area the viewer not only sees the Lady’s reminders of devotion but also is stuck with the notion of the nobility of the dedicating one’s self to a good and worthwhile cause. Her failure to remain true to her own beliefs is not only pictured by her present circumstances, but also by the symbols and allegories around her that reveals her fate for her failure to do so. As complex as it sounds, each attribute was chosen carefully creating an image that would leave an impact. By forcing the viewer to separate and identify each detail, in the end they were left with a message that was far more powerful than the image itself.

As in previous renderings the Lady still stands within her loom with her body twisting and struggling with the threads that bind her. Her head is bent as her luxurious hair blown by a “stormy east wind” flies wildly about, while behind her hangs the cracked mirror an “immaculate plane of the Lady’s own inspired intelligence” and the vehicle of her downfall. In this case the mirror also provides an anchor that connects the viewer to the original tale. (fig. 22) The additional details of the scene creates a visual connection with the words written by Tennyson:

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33 Ibid, 2.
Figure 22: William Holman Hunt
Detail of *The Lady of Shalott*
1886-1905
“On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye
That clothe the wold and meet the sky,
And thro’ the field the road runs by
To many tower’d Camelot…”

The countryside rolls gently back into the horizon and a tree lined river flows from around the island and through the fields. Reflected is Lancelot in full armor, unaware of the trouble he has just caused, riding towards Camelot sword raised in conceited exaltation, as two men walk ahead of him heralding his arrival. Unnoticed at first glance is the Lady’s own partial reflection. With just her hair and a small portion of her left arm visible, the viewer is drawn back into the room, an unobserved witness to the events unfolding.

While at the center, a glimpse of the present is provided at either side is are commentaries on the virtues of devotion. These scenes can be seen as an admonition of the Lady’s choice and a reminder of the nobility of dedication to an admirable cause. In the Manchester painting (fig. 21) Hunt provided only biblical allegories for the images to the left and right of the mirror. At the right is Christ Enthroned a symbol of whom the Lady owes her Christian devotion. To the left Hunt placed the scene of the Agony of Christ in the Garden. This could be seen as a reminder of Christ’s struggle between his human and divine self. This scene also prompts the viewer to think of the words that

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34 A. Tennyson, 8.
Christ left with his disciples before he proceeded to the garden; “Pray God that you will not fall when you are tempted.”

However, in the Wadsworth version (fig. 20) Hunt took a curious step by combining a spiritual and mythological message. Replacing Christ Enthroned is a triumphant Hercules completing the eleventh of his twelve labors. The labors were designed to help Hercules restore his honor after killing his wife and children in a fit of insanity. Here Hercules is completing his task by picking the golden apples from the tree in the garden of Hesperides. A feat accomplished only after the guardian serpent Ladon is slain and carried out while the daughters of Erbus sleep at the foot of the tree. By placing a halo on the head of Hercules, Hunt has turned a mythological character into a spiritual one of sorts. By defeating Ladon, Hercules becomes a mythological reference for Christ triumph over sin. Opposite Hercules and replacing Christ in Agony is the Virgin of Humility. This figure is “an early fifteenth century type of the Virgin and Child…” and it “embodies the theological concept that all virtues stem from humility…” This is a quality the Lady lacks in relinquishing her duty.

Above tying together these two orders of devotion and faithful service are the “music of the spheres.” An ancient concept, the “music of the spheres” was believed to keep the universe bound together by harmony. In this theory the “music of the spheres” “orders the heavens, and music alike orders and tempers human passions and social

35 Luke 22:39
Figure 23: William Holman Hunt
Study for tapestry ‘Sir Galahad offering the Holy Grail to King Arthur’
A biblical element is also mixed into this scene. One of the female figures to the right is seen stepping on the head of a snake like figure, a reference to coming of Christ and his defeat of sin. This is an allusion to the serpent that entered the Garden of Eden and first introduced sin in the world through the temptation of Eve. By crushing the serpent’s head it becomes a symbol of hope for the Lady as well as the viewer, a promise of a return to the perfect order that once was.

When asked about the similarities of his poem to the legends of King Arthur, Tennyson stated that any resemblance was a coincidence. Hunt has altered this and deliberately created a connection between Tennyson’s poem and the legends of King Arthur. No longer does she weave daily scenes rather as Hunt explains; “In executing her design on the tapestry she records not the external incidents of common lives but the present condition of King Arthur’s court, with it’s opposing influences of good and evil.”

In doing this Hunt also offers some clarification of why she works in her secluded location. The Lady is unable to venture into the world, because if she does she will no longer be able to provide an unbiased record of the events of the court. Before us is King Arthur seated on his throne in a saddened state, because he is without his Queen Guinevere, who like the Lady of Shalott, was tempted by Sir Lancelot and has failed to remain faithful to her king. However, on his right Arthur is supported by the virtues of charity and on his left are justice and truth. Below King Arthur are his faithful knights offering their services while at the center is the true and faithful knight, Sir

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38 Neuringer, 65.
39 Hunt, “*The Lady of Shalott,*” 3.
Galahad offering the Holy Grail upon his shield. Lancelot too, is included in the finished portion of the Lady’s tapestry, his head just visible to the far left. He is kneeling to the far left, vainly offering no gift but his lip service as he touches his fingers to his lips.

The images in the foreground are many and each provides its own message that point back to the Lady and her fate. While the meaning of the objects above may have been far more apparent, some images leave the viewer with questions. Exactly what the posts of the loom are meant to represent is not clear. Left unadorned in the Manchester painting, Hunt altered them for the Wadsworth piece. Opinions on this subject are few, but Samuel J. Wagstaff, curator at the Wadsworth Anthneum, made the one that tends to make the most sense, Wagstaff suggested that the posts are meant to reference at least three of the four natural elements: earth, water, and air. To the left is water with waves and jets of water shooting upwards and topped off by a scalloped shell. In the center is what is to be presumed is earth, leaves at the bottom, vines spiraling upward to what appears to be a bud of some sort. On the right is air, with sunrays at the bottom and clouds billowing towards the top. The elements are meant to represent the four pillars of the universe which work together to maintain natural and harmonious order. Just as with the “music of the spheres” above, a reference to the harmony of the earth is being made, a harmony that is obviously disrupted by the lack of the fourth element fire.

It is possible that the lamp was meant to represent the element of fire. Not only would it have lit the workspace but its flame could represent the knowledge of truth and light of God. Extinguished by the dove’s fearful flight, it to signify knowledge lost and the absence of divine presence. In the Manchester painting (fig. 21) the lamp holds
candles no longer lit. In the final piece (fig. 20) those candles are gone, and as a consequence a much stronger point is made as there is nothing left for that flame of knowledge to feed on. This unusual lamp incorporates itself into the message woven throughout the painting as well. The four owls at the top and just below the candleholders are also a symbol of intelligence and Athena the patron goddess of weaving and of divine wisdom. At the base of the lamp are four sphinxes, figures from mythology and also a symbol of wisdom. This is an odd combination; Thomas L. Jeffers points out that they along with the lamp are meant to represent “the triumph of the light of aesthetic wisdom over mystery and fear…”

As earlier stated it is thought that Hunt took some inspiration from Jan Van Eyck’s *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini.* (fig. 11) In looking at the very first image he attempted in 1850, the use of the smaller mirrors reflect various aspects that have direct reference to the central one that is used. Hunt seems to have once again returned to this piece for inspiration in composition. Just as in Van Eyck’s painting, Hunt has included flooring that is incised with further allusions to the primary scene. What some are meant to mean is: to the left there are sea-like creatures ringed in a circle, each one biting onto another’s tail. In the middle is a depiction of the struggle of nature as two foxes wait for a goat, a lion subdues an ox, and two men fight. Last on the right are a sword, sickle, screws, plow and a chain, but what are these in reference to, tools of war and peace or symbols of industry? At the edge of each of these sections is a skull and head of Medusa, often representing death. They could tie each scene together connected

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40 Wagstaff, 18.
with the never ending struggle between good and evil, life and death that has been and will always be faced.

The use of the wooden patens or shoes is another reference back to Jan Van Eyck’s painting. In Van Eyck’s painting Arnolfini has removed his shoes as a symbol of the sacredness of the union of marriage that they have entered into. The Lady, too, removes her shoes, symbolizing the sanctity of the room and the work she has been doing. The irises are almost a contradiction to meaning of the shoes that lay beside them. They symbolize the lack of respect the Lady has come to have with her task. In the past the iris, just as the lily, was a symbol of purity and a representation of the Virgin Mary. However in Victorian times the language of flowers took on a whole different meaning. The iris became a reference to the messenger of the Greek gods with the same name, thus implying a warning to be heeded. They could also be associated with “lost love and silent grief, for it was Iris who led young girls into the afterlife.”

All meanings could be associated with the Lady’s plight. There was most certainly a warning to be heeded and although she had only seen Lancelot once, there was a sense of grief and lost love about her as her actions and feelings lead her towards the curse, which appears to be death. As to the allusions to the purity of the Virgin, this is an attribute that she shared at one time; it is now lost as is represented by the flowers cast to the floor.

This excessive use of symbolism demonstrated Hunt’s desire to create art that was realistic and factual yet also deeply moving to the viewer. The iconography used was not

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so peculiar or outdated that the audience would not be able to understand their meanings. Items such as the wooden shoes, irises, or “music of the spheres”, had definitions as single objects that most educated people could understand. However, in the context of the painting Hunt’s unusual combinations of these items, such as the irises thrown to the floor, combined with the fact that the methods and beliefs applied now belonged to a period now passed, caused many to question what they were seeing. Unveiled to the public in May of 1905 at the Gallery of Arthur Tooth & Sons, many were overwhelmed by the paintings typological program. In a review by *The Times* a critic wrote, “All the accessories are splendid and elaborate, and many, as Hunt explains in a note, are symbolic…but after all, the symbolism of the picture is a secondary matter. What is important is that it should illustrate the poem and that it should be in itself beautiful in composition, form and colour.”43 This was a response that was typical of other critics who wrote on the painting, sentiments strangely echoing the very issue that Tennyson had brought before Hunt many years before. The painting should illustrate the source from which it originated. However in 1886 when Hunt had begun to work on the final rendering of *The Lady of Shalott*, was it still his intent to illustrate the poem in anyway?

We must also remember that in his poem Tennyson attempted to address the question of the risk of a life in seclusion in the name of art an issue, which he also explored in “The Palace of Art.” As an artist Hunt understood these problems and perhaps this is what drew him to the subject. The difference in interpretation came from their own experiences within their chosen profession of the arts. For Tennyson the truth centered on the ideal that the lack of life experience could prove detrimental to his work.

43 Neuringer, 68.
After all it was his life experiences that made their way into the poems that he wrote. The issue was entirely different for Hunt; lack of interaction was essential to creating a pure art form as he described in his supplement to *The Lady of Shalott* stating “… ‘sitting alone; in her isolation she is charged to see life with a mind supreme and elevated in judgement.”

**Conclusion**

By the time that Hunt had begun work on Tennyson’s illustration, his interpretations on the character of the Lady and her plight had already begun to shift. No longer was she just a figure of unrequited love or a fallen woman, she represented Hunt’s own struggle for the eternal truth. The third and final painting of *The Lady of Shalott* had become in essence a painted illustration of the truths and beliefs he had written about in his book *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. According to Hunt it was he who played a key role in the establishment of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood after encountering Ruskin’s principles on the execution and function of art. Whether he alone was the one to found the P.R.B. can be challenged, but what is certain is that Hunt took Ruskin’s words very seriously. He was also intrigued by Ruskin’s description of Tintoretto’s use of typological symbolism in San Rocco’s *Annunciation* in Venice, Italy. (fig. 24) From this point forward Hunt’s work is a reflection of the beliefs that so inspired him in the second volume of *Modern Painters*.

For a time Millais and Rossetti also adhered, in various degrees, to the ideology that had brought them together as a brotherhood, but never to the degree of devotion that Hunt had for them. As Hunt’s last finished work, *The Lady of Shalott* was a testament to

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44 Hunt, “*The Lady of Shalott,*” 2.
the level of dedication Hunt maintained for those written doctrines of Ruskin on the function of art. The symbols of devotion that reminded the Lady of her duty also symbolize Hunt’s dedication to the goals of the group. The Lady is a representation of those who failed to remain true to the calling that had been set before them, in this case Millais and Rossetti.

This painting could also be viewed as a last ditch effort to gain the recognition he lacked throughout his career. Hunt’s entire oeuvre was dedicated to the illustration of religion, whether it was in Christian teachings as in *The Light of the World* (fig. 25) or in Christian History as in *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*. (fig. 26) Even in his secular works such as, *The Hireling Shepherd* (fig. 27) or *The Awakening of Conscious*, (fig. 28) religious references were included. Yet throughout his career Hunt was never given notable recognition as a religious painter. George Landow quotes Hunt’s feeling on the matter from a letter written to the Reverend Robert St John Tyrwhitt quote

“why is [it] that I have been so persistently overlooked all my life by the very people who as Christians should have employed me? I know no other artist who is so outspoken and declared as a follower of our Lord then myself. I don’t boast of my excellence – only of my earnestness. I from the beginning of my career offended the great influential worldly ones by my refusal to make any compromises and I lost much fortune and much opportunity of showing my full powers to advantage”

Lack of recognition from Ruskin, the man whose work has inspired him so profoundly, was another issue that Hunt had to contend with. Despite Hunt’s exhaustive dedication to Ruskin’s principles he never once acknowledged his effort, although he had

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Figure 24: Jacopo Tintoretto
The Annunciation 1582-1587

Figure 25: William Holman Hunt
Light of the World, 1851-1853
Figure 26: William Holman Hunt
*The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*. 1854-1860

Figure 27: William Holman Hunt
*The Hireling Shepherd*, 1851-1852
Figure 28: William Holman Hunt
*The Awakening of Conscience*, 1853-1854
spoken of those of Rossetti, Millais and even Edward Burne-Jones, a follower of the principles of the Brotherhood. In his *Art of England* lecture, series Ruskin eluded that it was Rossetti, not Hunt, who started the religious movement within the group and Hunt was merely his follower. Lastly and perhaps the most painful blow, Ruskin claimed that it was Edward Burne-Jones, a second generation Pre-Raphaelite, who was the greatest artist of all, realizing the goals of the Brotherhood in the work of mythology, rather than religion as Hunt had so laboriously followed.\(^\text{46}\)

If one is to look at *The Lady of Shalott* as Hunt’s attempt to embody his ideals and beliefs of a life’s work then his drawing of 1850 (fig. 1) is the beginning of that realization. Hunt had not yet fully developed and attached his own principles to the piece; it was a first draft of initial ideas to come. As is stated in the introduction to this paper Hunt had not wanted this first drawing to be seen, fearing the undeveloped work would be seen as his finished idea.\(^\text{47}\) By the time Tennyson requested the illustrated work from him in 1854 the seeds of thought that had only begun to take hold in 1850 had begun to bloom. The Lady’s disregard of the task set before her was understandable and acceptable to Tennyson, it was not to Hunt. His own struggles to carry out what he saw as his God given duty allowed him to identify and at the time condemn the Lady for her lack of faith and devotion. It is hard to say if the inclusion of details that alluded to Christian values was purposeful or not. The illustration that was published in the 1857 book of poems (fig. 13) is not as saturated with typological symbolism as his final work of 1905. Perhaps Hunt understood the limitations of his freedom of analysis within his

\(^{46}\) Ibid, 320-322.
\(^{47}\) Poulson, 180.
commission. Although Hunt had taken artistic license on the interpretation of Tennyson’s words and included religious components the original structure of the subject can still be seen.

By the time Hunt began his oil sketch (fig. 21) for the final work finished in 1905 (fig. 20) it was no longer his goal to merely illustrate the poem as he had in 1850. The subject is so far removed from the first rendering and poem that it is only through the central character and vague similarities that one can still tie it to Tennyson’s original work. In the words that John Ruskin offered to Tennyson on his disappointment of his book offers us an explanation of how two decidedly different views could have evolved from one subject.

“Many of the plates are noble things, though not, it seems to me, illustrations of your poems. I believe, in fact, that good pictures never can be; they are always another poem, subordinate but wholly different from the poet’s conception, and serve chiefly to show the reader how variously the same verses may affect various minds…”48

This is what Hunt’s painting had become, another poem, an homage to a life’s work and beliefs and a lesson to us all on the value of dedicated devotion.

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48 Harris, 33.
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The Lady of Shalott (1842)

Part I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."
Part II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.
Part III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
   Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
   To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
   Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
   Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
   A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
   Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
   As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
   Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
   Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
   From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
   As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
   He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
   Sang Sir Lancelot.
She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Part IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote

The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance--
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right--
The leaves upon her falling light--
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.
Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.

For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."63