

Core 301

Hist. Of Eng. Lit. 1832-1890

Unit 2 : Poems

1. 'The Lady of Shallot'

-By Alfred Tennyson

01.About the Author:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in full Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson of Aldworth and Freshwater, (born August 6, 1809, Somersby, Lincolnshire, England—died October 6, 1892, Aldworth, Surrey), English poet often regarded as the chief representative of the Victorian age in poetry. He was raised to the peerage in 1884.

- *A list of works by Tennyson follows:*

Poems by Two Brothers (published 1826; dated 1827 on title page; written with Charles Tennyson)

“Timbuctoo” (for which he won chancellor’s gold medal and was printed in *Prolusiones Academicæ*)

Poems, Chiefly Lyrical (1830), in which the following poems were published:

“All Things Will Die”[52]

“The Deserted House”

“The Dying Swan”

“The Kraken”

“Mariana”

“Nothing Will Die”

02. About the Poem:

“The Lady of Shalott” is a lyrical ballad by the 19th-century English poet Alfred Tennyson and one of his best-known works. Inspired by the 13th-century Italian short prose text *Donna di Scalotta*, the poem tells the tragic story of Elaine of Astolat, a young noblewoman stranded in a tower up the river from Camelot. Tennyson wrote two versions of the poem, one published in 1832 (in *Poems*, incorrectly dated 1833), [2] of 20 stanzas, the other in 1842, of 19 stanzas (also in a book named *Poems*), and returned to the story in “Lancelot and Elaine”. The vivid medieval romanticism and enigmatic symbolism of “The Lady of Shalott” inspired many painters, especially the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers, as well as other authors and artists.

03. Rhyme Scheme:

“The Lady of Shalott” follows a very strict **AAAABCCCB** rhyme scheme, which serves to add a lyrical feel to the poem, since rhyming words encourage natural pauses and emphasize structure. The “Camelot” and “Shalott” refrains form the B rhymes in each stanza, which adds emphasis to the repeated words and centralizes their thematic importance through repetition.

Why was the lady of Shalott cursed?

****Because the witch Morgana Le Fay was jealous of the lady’s beauty and locked in the tower with the curse to not be able to look out of the window or she would die.****

04. Critical Analysis:

In Part One

The poem opens with Shalott's description. Shalott is an island on a river near Camelot. The Lady of Shalott lives inside a castle with four grey walls and four grey towers on the island. The lady is incarcerated. She has never been seen by passers-by, but people know she exists because reapers occasionally hear her sing in the early morning. The reapers refer to her as "the fairy Lady of Shalott."

"Four gray walls, and four gray towers,"*

"Overlook a space of flowers, And the silent isle imbowers, The Lady of Shalott."*

Part Two

Begins with the Lady spinning a magical web. We learn that a curse has been placed on her, preventing her from peering through the window to Camelot. The lady looks out the window and into the world through a mirror. She notices the road, the river, and the people who pass by. She incorporates everything she sees into the web. The Lady is lonely and yearns for company and love.

"I am half sick of shadows," said*

The Lady of Shalott.

Part Three

Sir Lancelot rides near the tower. As he rides towards Camelot, the sun shines on his armour and he sings. As his image flashes in the mirror, the lady exits the web, walks across the room, and gazes out the window at Camelot. The curse has struck. The spider's web shoots out the window and the mirror fractures from side to side.

"The curse has come upon me," The Lady of Shalott exclaimed.

Part Four

The weather is dark and stormy. The lady exits the castle and signs her name on the side of a boat. She climbs aboard the boat and sings her final song as she floats down to Camelot. As she approaches Camelot, her blood freezes and she dies. The inhabitants of the city gather to see the lady float by. In the king's palace, applause fade to stillness, and Lancelot remarks,

"She has a lovely face; God in his mercy land her grace, The Lady of Shalott."

Conclusion:

The Lady of Shalott does not fulfill her dreams of love and freedom, as she ultimately freezes to death while trying to reach Camelot. The people of Camelot see her name written on the side of her boat and wonder who she is and what happened.

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