

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Lady of Shalott

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1832

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was the Poet Laureate of Great Britain for over 40 years during the Victorian period, and remains one of the most popular British poets today. His writing was largely inspired by mythology, especially the tales of King Arthur—the legendary king of the Britons who, with his knights of the round table, went on noble quests to keep the kingdom of Camelot safe. As you read, take notes on how the poem's form and language contribute to its meaning.

Part I

- [1] On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold¹ and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
- [5] To many-tower'd Camelot;
The yellow-leaved waterlily
The green-sheathed daffodilly
Tremble in the water chilly
 Round about Shalott.
- [10] Willows whiten, aspens² shiver.
The sunbeam showers break and quiver
In the stream that runneth ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot.
- [15] Four gray walls, and four gray towers
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers³
 The Lady of Shalott.
- Underneath the bearded barley,
[20] The reaper,⁴ reaping late and early,
Hears her ever chanting cheerly,
Like an angel, singing clearly,
 O'er the stream of Camelot.
Piling the sheaves⁵ in furrows⁶ airy,
- [25] Beneath the moon, the reaper weary
Listening whispers, 'Tis the fairy,
 Lady of Shalott.'



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1. The moor, or any large open wild fields
2. An aspen is another kind of tree
3. Surrounds in a shady, leafy shelter or garden
4. A farmer harvesting crops

The little isle is all inrail'd⁷
With a rose-fence, and overtrail'd
[30] With roses: by the marge⁸ unhail'd
The shallop⁹ flitteth¹⁰ silken sail'd,
 Skimming down to Camelot.
A pearl garland¹¹ winds her head:
She leaneth on a velvet bed,
[35] Full royally apparelled,¹²
 The Lady of Shalott.

Part II

No time hath she to sport and play:
A charmed web she weaves away.
A curse is on her, if she stay
[40] Her weaving, either night or day,
 To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be;
Therefore she weaveth steadily,
Therefore no other care hath she,
[45] The Lady of Shalott.

She lives with little joy or fear.
Over the water, running near,
The sheepbell tinkles in her ear.
Before her hangs a mirror clear,
[50] Reflecting tower'd Camelot.
And as the mazy web she whirls,
She sees the surly¹³ village churls,¹⁴
And the red cloaks of market girls
 Pass onward from Shalott.

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5. Bundles
 6. Lines of crops
 7. Enclosed or surrounded
 8. A poetic way to say the margin or the edge
 9. A small sailboat
 10. Flits, or moves lightly and rapidly
 11. A circular decoration usually made from flowers
 12. Clothed
 13. **Surly** (*adjective*): rude or bad-tempered
 14. Farm workers

[55] Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot¹⁵ on an ambling¹⁶ pad,¹⁷
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
Or long-hair'd page¹⁸ in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot:

[60] 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
[65] To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, came from Camelot:

Or when the moon was overhead
[70] Came two young lovers lately wed;
'I am half sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott.

Part III

A bow-shot¹⁹ from her bower-eaves,²⁰
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
[75] The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flam'd upon the brazen²¹ greaves²²
Of bold Sir Lancelot.²³

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
[80] That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

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15. A monk
 16. **Amble (verb):** to walk or move at a slow, relaxed pace
 17. Path, lane, or road
 18. A page is an assistant to a knight
 19. The distance to which a bow can send an arrow
 20. "Bower" refers to a lady's bedroom in a medieval castle, and "eaves" refers to the overhang of a roof.
 21. Made of brass
 22. A piece of armor that protects the shins
 23. Sir Lancelot was King Arthur's best knight: strong, handsome, brave, and chivalrous.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.

- [85] The bridle bells rang merrily
 As he rode down from Camelot:
And from his blazon'd²⁴ baldric²⁵ slung
A mighty silver bugle²⁶ hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
[90] 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,
[95] As he rode down from Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
 Moves over green Shalott.

- [100] 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 from Camelot.
[105] From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
'Tirra lirra, tirra lirra:'²⁷
 Sang Sir Lancelot.

- She left the web, she left the loom
[110] She made three paces thro' the room
She saw the water-flower bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
 She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
[115] The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me,' cried
 The Lady of Shalott.

24. Decorated with traditional symbols and coats of arms

25. A wide sash or belt for carrying a sword

26. A bugle is a miniature trumpet

27. "Tirra-lirra" is a phrase from Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale*, used to describe the sound of a lark singing cheerfully in the background while a conman named Autolycus thieves and canoodles with various women.

Part IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,²⁸
[120] The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Outside the isle a shallow boat
Beneath a willow lay afloat,
[125] Below the carven²⁹ stern³⁰ she wrote,
The Lady of Shalott.

A cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight,³¹
All raimented³² in snowy white
That loosely flew (her zone in sight
[130] Clasp'd with one blinding diamond bright)
Her wide eyes fix'd on Camelot,
Though the squally³³ east-wind keenly
Blew, with folded arms serenely
By the water stood the queenly
[135] Lady of Shalott.

With a steady stony glance—
Like some bold seer³⁴ in a trance,
Beholding all his own mischance,
Mute, with a glassy countenance—³⁵
[140] She look'd down to Camelot.
It was the closing of the day:
She loos'd the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

[145] As when to sailors while they roam,
By creeks and outfalls far from home,
Rising and dropping with the foam,
From dying swans wild warblings³⁶ come,
Blown shoreward; so to Camelot
[150] Still as the boathead wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her chanting her deathsong,
The Lady of Shalott.

28. **Wane** (*verb*): to get smaller; to diminish

29. Carved

30. The front of a boat

31. An archaic word for "equipped"

32. Clothed

33. Stormy, dangerous, and unsteady

34. A psychic who can see into the future

35. **Countenance** (*noun*): facial expression

A longdrawn carol, mournful, holy,
[155] She chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her eyes were darken'd wholly,
And her smooth face sharpen'd slowly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot:
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
[160] 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,
[165] A pale, pale corpse she floated by,
Deadcold, between the houses high,
Dead into tower'd Camelot.
Knight and burgher,³⁷ lord and dame,
To the planked wharfage³⁸ came:
[170] Below the stern they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

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36. Songs with trills or unsteady voices
37. Townspeople, especially the rich and respectable residents
38. The wharf or pier at the water's edge where ships can be tied up

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO of the following best identify the central themes of this poem? [RL.2]
 - A. Love can overcome any obstacle.
 - B. Isolation can be trying for the soul.
 - C. Communities come together over tragedy.
 - D. Virtue is always rewarded.
 - E. Heroism and adventure are praiseworthy.
 - F. Taking chances does not always lead to a happy ending.

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases from the text best support the answers to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "Long fields of barley and of rye, / That clothe the wold and meet the sky" (Lines 2-3)
 - B. "'I am half sick of shadows'" (Line 71)
 - C. "The helmet and the helmet-feather / Burn'd like one burning flame together" (Lines 93-94)
 - D. "'The curse is come upon me,' cried / The Lady of Shalott" (Lines 116-117)
 - E. "All raimented in snowy white" (Line 128)
 - F. "Below the stern they read her name, / The Lady of Shalott." (Lines 170-171)

3. PART A: What does the word "stay" most closely mean as it is used in line 39? [RL.4]
 - A. To remain in one place
 - B. To steady or keep constant
 - C. To wait for
 - D. To pause or stop

4. PART B: Which line from the stanza best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. "No time hath she to sport and play" (Line 37)
 - B. "She knows not what the curse may be" (Line 42)
 - C. "Therefore she weaveth steadily" (Line 43)
 - D. "Therefore no other care hath she" (Line 44)

5. Contrast the townspeople's point of view of Lady of Shalott in Part I with the descriptions of her in Part II. How do these different points of view create tension in the poem? [RL.6]

6. Which of the following best explains how the poem's form contributes to its meaning? [RL.5]

- A. The repetition of "the Lady of Shalott" is ironic since her name is emphasized, but she is not the focus of the poem.
- B. The rhyme scheme of this poem creates an eerie, unsettling tone, since most of the rhymes are discordant and aesthetically displeasing.
- C. The repetition of "the Lady of Shalott" and the rhyme scheme that emphasizes her name provide a contrast with the end of the poem, in which only the Lady's name is left.
- D. The repetition of Shalott that rhymes repeatedly with Lancelot and Camelot reinforce the Lady's longing for this person and place.

7. What is the role of the mirror in the poem? [RL.5]

- A. The mirror is a symbol of vanity that helps characterize the Lady of Shalott.
- B. The mirror is part of the magical fantasy world and primarily serves to represent the Lady of Shalott's wealth.
- C. The magical window to the outside world shows only "shadows," while the Lady of Shalott longs for things of substance.
- D. The magic mirror serves as an ironic device because it appears to be helpful to the Lady of Shalott, but is actually the source of her terrible curse.

8. PART A: What does the phrase "bearded meteor" refer to as it is used in line 98? [RL.4]

- A. A magic spell speeding through the sky above Shalott
- B. Sir Lancelot riding across the land
- C. The magic mirror's reflected light
- D. The metaphorical flames of love

9. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]

- A. "As he rode down from Camelot" (Line 95)
- B. "As often thro' the purple night," (Line 96)
- C. "Below the starry clusters bright," (Line 97)
- D. "Moves over green Shalott" (Line 99)

10. How does the poem's setting relate to the theme of loneliness? Cite evidence from the poem in your response. [RL.3]
