

She said, "I am aweary, aweary
I would that I were dead!"

The sparrow's chirrup on the roof
The slow clock ticking, and the
75 Which to the wooing wind aloof
The poplar made, did all comfort
Her sense; but most she loathed to hear
When the thick-moted sunbeam
Athwart the chambers, and the
80 Was sloping toward his western bar
Then, said she, "I am very dreary
He will not come," she said
She wept, "I am aweary, aweary
Oh God, that I were dead!"

The Lady of Shalott¹

Part I

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

10 Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Through the wave that runs forever
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 imbowers
 The Lady of Shalott.

20 By the margin, willow-veiled,
Slide the heavy barges trailed
By slow horses; and unhailed

rolling plain

bloom

1. The story of the Lady of Shalott is a version of the tale of "Elaine the fair maid of Astolat," which appears in book 18 of *Morte Darthur* (1470) by Sir Thomas Malory (ca. 1405–1471). Tennyson, however, claimed he did not know Malory's version when he wrote his draft in 1832, identifying his source as a 14th-century tale about "la Damigella

di Scalot": "I met the story first in some Italian *novelle*: but the web, mirror, island, etc., were my own. 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*." Tennyson subjected this poem to numerous revisions over the years.

The shallop^o flitteth silken-sailed
 Skimming down to Camelot:
 But who hath seen her wave her hand?
 25 Or at the casement seen her stand?
 Or is she known in all the land,
 The Lady of Shalott?

light open boat

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

Part 2

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

pause

And moving through a mirror clear²
 That hangs before her all the year,
 Shadows of the world appear.
 There she sees the highway near
 50 Winding down to Camelot;
 There the river eddy whirls,
 And there the surly village churls,^o
 And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

peasants

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

easy-paced horse

2. Weavers used mirrors, placed facing their looms, to see the progress of their work.

But in her web she still delights
 65 To weave the mirror's magic sights,
 For often through the silent nights
 A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, went to 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 3

A bowshot from her bower eaves,
 He rode between the barley sheaves,
 75 The sun came dazzling through the leaves,
 And flamed upon the brazen greaves³
 Of bold Sir Lancelot.
 A red-cross knight forever kneeled
 To a lady in his shield,
 80 That sparkled on the yellow field,
 Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glittered free,
 Like to some branch of stars we see
 Hung in the golden Galaxy.
 85 The bridle bells rang merrily
 As he rode down to Camelot;
 And from his blazoned baldric⁴ slung
 A mighty silver bugle hung,
 And as he rode his armor rung,
 90 Beside remote Shalott.

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

100 His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed;
 On burnished hooves his war horse trode;
 From underneath his helmet flowed
 His coal-black curls as on he rode,
 As he rode down to Camelot.
 105 From the bank and from the river
 He flashed into the crystal mirror,

3. Armor protecting the leg below the knee.

4. A belt worn diagonally from one shoulder to

the opposite hip, supporting a sword or bugle.
 "Blazoned": painted with a heraldic device.

"Tirra lirra,"⁵ by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

110 She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She looked down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
115 The mirror cracked from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Part 4

In the stormy east wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
120 The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over towered Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
125 And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
130 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,
135 The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Through the noises of the night
140 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.

145 Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darkened wholly,⁶

5. Cf. Autolycus's song in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* 4.3.9: "The lark, that tirra-lirra chants."
6. In the 1832 version this line read: "And her

smooth face sharpened slowly." George Eliot informed Tennyson that she preferred the earlier version.



The Lady of Shalott. This 1857 engraving, created by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for publisher Edward Moxon's illustrated collection of Tennyson's poetry, shows Lancelot musing "a little space" on the Lady in her boat.

Turned to towered Camelot.
 150 For ere she reached upon the tide
 The first house by the waterside,
 Singing in her song she died,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
 155 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,
 160 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
 165 Died the sound of royal cheer;

And they crossed themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot:
 But Lancelot mused a little space;
 He said, "She has a lovely face;
 170 God in his mercy lend her grace,
 The Lady of Shalott."

1831-32

1832, 1842

The Lotos-Eaters¹

"Courage!" he² said, and pointed toward the land,
 "This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."
 In the afternoon they came unto a land³
 In which it seemèd always afternoon.
 5 All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
 Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
 Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
 And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream
 Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

10 A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
 Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn,^o did go;
 And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
 Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
 They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
 15 From the inner land; far off, three mountaintops
 Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
 Stood sunset-flushed; and, dewed with showery drops,
 Up-clomb^o the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

20 The charmèd sunset lingered low adown
 In the red West; through mountain clefts the dale
 Was seen far inland, and the yellow down⁴
 Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale
 And meadow, set with slender galingale;⁵
 25 A land where all things always seemèd the same!
 And round about the keel with faces pale,

*fine thin linen**climbed up*

1. Based on a short episode from the *Odyssey* (9.82-97) in which the weary Greek veterans of the Trojan War are tempted by a desire to abandon their long voyage homeward. As Odysseus later reported: "On the tenth day we set foot on the land of the lotos-eaters who eat a flowering food. . . I sent forth certain of my company [who] . . . mixed with the men of the lotos-eaters who gave . . . them of the lotos to taste. Now whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of the lotos had no more wish to bring tidings nor to come back, but there he chose to abide . . . forgetful of his homeward way."

Tennyson expands Homer's brief account into an elaborate picture of weariness and the desire

for rest and death. The descriptions in the first stanzas are similar to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) 2.6 and employ the same stanza form. The final section derives, in part, from Lucretius's conception of the gods in *De Rerum Natura* (ca. 55 B.C.E.).

2. Odysseus (or Ulysses).

3. The repetition of "land" from line 1 was deliberate; Tennyson said that this "no rhyme" was "lazier" in its effect. This technique of repeating words, phrases, and sounds continues: cf. "afternoon" (lines 3-4) and the rhyming of "adown" and "down" (lines 19 and 21).

4. An open plain on high ground.

5. A plant resembling tall coarse grass.