

"I HAVE NEVER SEEN A NAKED LADY OF SHALOTT"*

--With this arresting statement, Shelah Horvitz in her article, "My Lady of Shalott" (The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, May 1983) raises interesting questions about the duty of an illustrator toward the literary work he illustrates. Is Ms. Horvitz, herself an illustrator, obliged to clothe the Lady of Shalott?

Tennyson would probably say that, although in the poem he gave no indication of what she wore, he had visualized her as clothed, and so she must be depicted.¹ "An illustrator," he declared, "ought never to add anything to what he finds in the text."² Or, we assume, take away -- even that which is not specifically mentioned.

Ms. Horvitz, who showed the Lady naked, continued: "I am aware that the liberties I took . . . hold so little relation to Tennyson's poetic intentions that it could be said that I left his Lady of Shalott and invented my own."³ Her excuse is that she meant not so much to illustrate the poem as to "take it as inspiration." Earlier illustrators also used the poem to provide inspiration or, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's famous phrase, the impetus to "allegorize on one's own hook." Rossetti himself, according to his brother, "drew just what he chose, taking from his author's text nothing more than a hint and an opportunity . . ."⁴

Ms. Horvitz is clearly aligned with Rossetti in conceiving the illustrator's function as not simply to depict the "facts" in a work of literature but to augment the meaning of that work with his own interpretation. Tennyson finds this attitude reprehensible, a perversion of the writer's vision.

Is the illustrator justified in introducing his own vision into the illustration? This question can be explored further through a study of the Pre-Raphaelite illustrations for "The Lady of Shalott," which -- like Ms. Horvitz's -- tell us a great deal about the artists themselves and the spirit of their time.

Tennyson did not encourage artists to illustrate his poems. He preferred to publish them in the simplest manner, eschewing fancy bindings and pictures. In addition, he felt that illustrators "never seemed to illustrate his own ideas."⁵ As an artist, he could not have believed that his poems demanded explication or enhancement through illustration;

*See Shelah Horvitz, "My Lady of Shalott," JPRS, III/2, May 1983.