

MY LADY OF SHALOTT

In my own Lady of Shalott, I have taken great artistic license with the details of the poem, because as the drawing developed, the subject acquired nuances which Tennyson never intended but which belonged in a picture that I would do. Although I had seen many Ladies of Shalott during the execution of my version, the ones which I had the most access to and which therefore had the most influence on my own work were that by Hunt and the two later versions by Waterhouse, the 1894 Lady of Shalott which shows the Lady whirling from her loom to face Lancelot, and the 1915 "I am Half-Sick of Shadows," said the Lady of Shalott.

Hunt and Waterhouse both considered the moment when the mirror cracks as the climax of the poem, and indeed it is the moment of greatest action; but if one defines a climax as a turning point, one more fittingly depicts the moment when the Lady says, "I am half-sick of shadows." When the poem commences, "little other care hath she" besides her weaving; yet when she sees the newly-married lovers kissing in her mirror and says, "I am half-sick of shadows," she has reached a psychological turning point after which the appearance of Lancelot is only an excuse to turn from the loom. "She hath no loyal knight and true" -- that is the conflict that nags her, and she is sick of shadows because the lovers remind her that she is imprisoned.

In his 1915 Lady of Shalott, J. W. Waterhouse portrayed this moment as one of crushing ennui. I interpreted the moment differently. My Lady does not turn from the mirror ultimately because she is bored but because she is desperate. She is trapped in her room with no life to look forward to but her weaving. So it is desperation I chose to show at the psychological turning point.

Powerful emotions are difficult to portray without melodrama, and a grimacing face tends to alienate the viewer rather than encourage him to sympathize with emotion. Because more emotive force can be achieved through the body than through the face, my Lady's pose is crucial as the organizing force for the entire work. I have her drawn in upon herself, hugging her legs, facing away from the loom. I also have represented her naked, which demands an explanation, since I have never seen a naked Lady of Shalott. From a formal point of view, she is naked because with clothes covering her there was no way I could show the tension in her muscles -- the latissimus dorsi in her back flexed and the bicep squeezed against her knee. From the standpoint of content, she is naked because she not only obviously craves sensuality and sexuality but also because she is defenseless against her curse. I have used nudity to convey both sexuality and vulnerability. Yet the pose