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Lord Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” in Comparison to *Snow White and the Huntsman*

What comes to mind when phrases are mentioned such as a beautiful princess who is locked away in a tower and a magical mirror which has a purpose much greater than seeing a reflection? To most people, the first notion that would come to their minds would be some of the traditional fairy tales. Little children love to be read fairy tales, and adults still enjoy reading these imaginative stories to them. Some examples of fairy tales go far back into history. One Victorian work, Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” mirrors the format of a fairy tale. This poem can be compared to many of the modern-day fairy tales, as it depicts a cursed maiden who is locked away in a tall tower and in the end must go in search for her own happiness. One famous story in today’s world in particular has many similarities when compared to “The Lady of Shalott” and it is the movie *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Some similarities that these two storylines share are a magical mirror, internal goodness from the main character, a love interest, and an escape for freedom.

The story within the poem “The Lady of Shalott” has mostly to do with the girl being trapped in the tower without knowing what her life could be like if she were to walk upon the land of Camelot; “Four gray walls, and four gray towers,/ Overlook a space of flowers,/ And the silent isle imbowers/ The Lady of Shalott” (Tennyson l. 15-18). The Lady is alienated from the world because she “is living under an evil yet vague threat on her life” (Bloom 16). The curse that keeps her in the tower requires her to only see the outside world from the mirror, which is an
object seen in many fairytales, and the images that she sees are the scenes that she weaves to pass her time. In the storyline of *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the evil queen looks upon her magical mirror often and asks the well-known question, “Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” The queen looks to the mirror for reassurance but also for answers; the Lady looks to the mirror for guidance and answers as well.

With every rule there is a consequence that lies in waiting if that rule were to be broken. The Lady knows that she must look through the mirror because “If she dares look upon that world a curse will fall upon her” (Bloom 16). When the reader learns of the curse placed upon the Lady, the question of why she was picked for the curse is pondered. When the Lady’s singing is heard in the poem only early reapers hear her sweet song “And by the moon the reaper weary,/Piling sheaves in uplands airy,/Listening, whispers ‘’Tis the fairy/ Lady of Shalott’” (Tennyson l. 33-36). The people call her a fairy and it gives the idea that the Lady is good for the land, just as Snow White is. The evil Queen Ravenna locked away Snow White who made their land a better place because she was the epitome of all that was good in nature. If the Lady of Shalott had been free, would Camelot have been affected just as the land of Snow White’s was when she was free?

In every good fairy tale there is the male character who acts as “the knight in shining armor,” so to speak. In the poem “The Lady of Shalott,” this is indeed the case when Sir Lancelot is introduced. When the Lady sees the man in her mirror, she becomes so distracted she breaks the rules and the curse is then upon her; “She looked down to Camelot./Out flew the web and floated wide;/The mirror cracked from side to side;/ ‘The curse is come upon me,’ cried/ The Lady of Shalott” (Tennyson l. 113-117). Sadly, in this poem, the love aspect that people look for in fairy tales is not one with a happy ending. Sir Lancelot does not see the Lady until it
is too late because the curse and death claimed her. While the reader is reading this part of the poem, he or she does get to think about what could have been once Lancelot sees the Lady; “Only Lancelot speaks, remarking on her beauty and expressing the hope that she will be blessed by God in her death” (Dooley 3). This moment in this storyline is very similar to a dramatic scene in *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Snow White, just like the Lady, is claimed in death by a curse. Once the huntsman sees that Snow White is dead, the viewer sees the amount of love that he has for her and just as in “The Lady of Shalott,” the viewer is left to wonder why the confession comes too late. Snow White’s story was one that worked more in the main character’s favor because her true love broke her curse, and could the same have happened for the Lady? People cannot help but to think about what could have been between Sir Lancelot and the Lady of Shalott.

Another common factor within these two works is the way in which the two main characters escape. The Lady of Shalott escapes the tower and it almost seems as though she is trying to outrun her curse. In *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the same is true for Snow White because she escapes from not only the tower, but she tries to escape from the strong hold of the evil Queen Ravenna. The Lady of Shalott escapes to the river and drifts away in the boat; “And at the closing of the day/ She loosed the chain, and down she lay;/ The broad stream bore her far away,/ The Lady of Shalott” (Tennyson l. 132-135). At this point in the poem, the curse took hold and the Lady was no more but she has still gotten her freedom. In the modern day fairy tale *Snow White and the Huntsman*, there is a happier result for the princess Snow White because when she escaped she spent the rest of the story fighting to keep that freedom.

Overall, there are many similarities between “The Lady of Shalott” and *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Just a few of these similarities have been discussed and those main similar aspects
are: the mirror, the goodness that the two main characters show within themselves, the men that
the readers and viewers want nothing but a “happily ever after” from their love story, and an
escape from the imprisonment forced upon the Lady of Shalott and Snow White. If the Lady of
Shalott had found a way to break her curse without the death that was inflicted, would she have
had the “happily ever after” that is shown in Snow White and the Huntsman and what readers are
so used to in today’s modern world of fairy tales?
Works Cited


