



VICTORIAN POETRY
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ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON (1809–1892)

"The Lady of Shalott"



PART I

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

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river

 Flowing down to Camelot.

Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers

 The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd

 Skimming down to Camelot:

But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,

 The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,

 Down to tower'd Camelot:

And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy

 Lady of Shalott."

PART II

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

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
 Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
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
 To weave the mirror's magic sights,
 For often thro' the silent nights
 A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, went to Camelot:
 Or when the moon was overhead,
 Came two young lovers lately wed:
 "I am half sick of shadows," said
 The Lady of Shalott.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
 He rode between the barley-sheaves,
 The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
 And flamed upon the brazen greaves
 Of bold Sir Lancelot.
 A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
 To a lady in his shield,
 That sparkled on the yellow field,
 Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
 Like to some branch of stars we see
 Hung in the golden Galaxy.
 The bridle bells rang merrily
 As he rode down to Camelot:
 And from his blazon'd baldric slung
 A mighty silver bugle hung,
 And as he rode his armour rung,
 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,
 As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
 Moves over still Shalott.

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 to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
 Sang Sir Lancelot.

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

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining

Over tower'd Camelot;

Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote

The Lady of Shalott.

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

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

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.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,

Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.

For ere she reach'd upon the tide
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,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,

Silent into Camelot.

Out upon the wharfs they came,
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
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,

All the knights at Camelot:

But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,

The Lady of Shalott."

ROBERT BROWNING (1812–1889)

"My Last Duchess"

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
the curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en that would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806–1861)

"The Cry of the Children"

Alas, alas, why do you gaze at me with your eyes, my children?

—*Medea*

I

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
 Ere the sorrow comes with years ?
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
 And that cannot stop their tears.
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,
 They are weeping bitterly !
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
 In the country of the free.

II

Do you question the young children in the sorrow
 Why their tears are falling so ?
 The old man may weep for his to-morrow
 Which is lost in Long Ago;
 The old tree is leafless in the forest,
 The old year is ending in the frost,
 The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
 The old hope is hardest to be lost :
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,
 Do you ask them why they stand
 Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
 In our happy Fatherland ?

III

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
 And their looks are sad to see,
 For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses
 Down the cheeks of infancy;
 "Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary,
 Our young feet," they say, "are very weak;
 Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—
 Our grave-rest is very far to seek :
 Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,
 For the outside earth is cold,
 And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
 And the graves are for the old !"

IV

"True," say the children, "it may happen
 That we die before our time :
 Little Alice died last year her grave is shapen
 Like a snowball, in the rime.
 We looked into the pit prepared to take her :
 Was no room for any work in the close clay !
 From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
 Crying, 'Get up, little Alice ! it is day.'
 If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
 With your ear down, little Alice never cries ;
 Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
 For the smile has time for growing in her eyes :
 And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
 The shroud, by the kirk-chime .
 It is good when it happens," say the children,
 "That we die before our time !"

V

Alas, alas, the children ! they are seeking
 Death in life, as best to have :
 They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
 With a cerement from the grave.
 Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
 Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do ;
 Pluck you handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty.
 Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through !
 But they answer, "Are your cowslips of the meadows
 Like our weeds anear the mine ?
 Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
 From your pleasures fair and fine!

VI

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,
 And we cannot run or leap ;
 If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
 To drop down in them and sleep.
 Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go ;
 And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
 For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
 Through the coal-dark, underground ;
 Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
 In the factories, round and round.

VII

"For all day, the wheels are droning, turning ;
 Their wind comes in our faces,

Till our hearts turn, our heads, with pulses burning,
 And the walls turn in their places :
 Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
 Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
 Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling :
 All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
 And all day the iron wheels are droning,
 And sometimes we could pray,
 'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),
 'Stop ! be silent for to-day ! ' "

VIII

Ay, be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing
 For a moment, mouth to mouth !
 Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
 Of their tender human youth !
 Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
 Is not all the life God fashions or reveals :
 Let them prove their inward souls against the notion
 That they live in you, or under you, O wheels !
 Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
 Grinding life down from its mark ;
 And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
 Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
 To look up to Him and pray ;
 So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,
 Will bless them another day.
 They answer, " Who is God that He should hear us,
 While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred ?

When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
 Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
 And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
 Strangers speaking at the door :
 Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
 Hears our weeping any more ?

X

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
 And at midnight's hour of harm,
 'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
 We say softly for a charm.
 We know no other words, except 'Our Father,'
 And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
 God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
 And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
 'Our Father !' If He heard us, He would surely
 (For they call Him good and mild)
 Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
 'Come and rest with me, my child.'

XI

"But, no !" say the children, weeping faster,
 "He is speechless as a stone :
 And they tell us, of His image is the master
 Who commands us to work on.
 Go to !" say the children,— "up in Heaven,
 Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
 Do not mock us ; grief has made us unbelieving :
 We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."
 Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
 O my brothers, what ye preach ?

For God's possible is taught by His world's loving,
 And the children doubt of each.

XII

And well may the children weep before you !
 They are weary ere they run ;
 They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
 Which is brighter than the sun.
 They know the grief of man, without its wisdom ;
 They sink in the despair, without its calm ;
 Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,
 Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm :
 Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly
 No dear remembrance keep,—
 Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
 Let them weep ! let them weep !

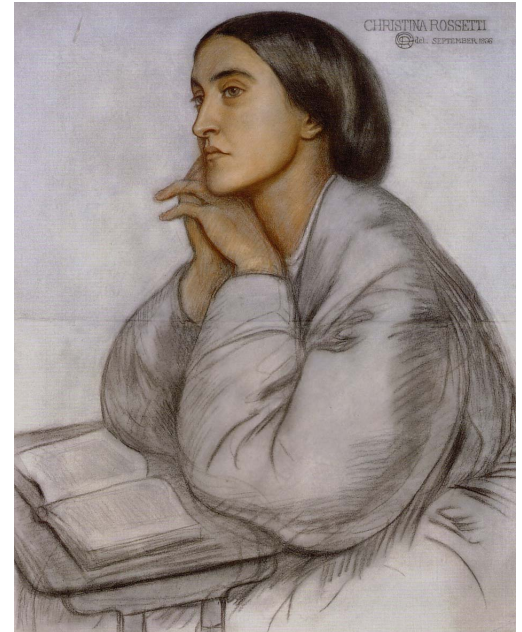
XIII

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
 And their look is dread to see,
 For they mind you see their angels in their places,
 With eyes turned on Deity.
 "How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
 Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—
 Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
 And tread onward to your throne amid the mart ?
 Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
 And your purple shows your path !
 But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
 Than the strong man in his wrath !"

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830–1894)

"In an Artist's Studio"

One face looks out from all his canvases,
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
 A saint, an angel;—every canvas means
 The same one meaning, neither more or less.
 He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.



"A Birthday"

My heart is like a singing bird
 Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
 My heart is like an appletree
 Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
 My heart is like a rainbow shell
 That paddles in a halcyon sea;
 My heart is gladder than all these
 Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
 Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
 Carve it in doves, and pomegranates,

And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
 Work it in gold and silver grapes,
 In leaves, and silver fleurs-de-lys;
 Because the birthday of my life
 Is come, my love is come to me.

"No Thank You, John"

I never said I loved you, John:
 Why will you teaze me day by day,
 And wax a weariness to think upon
 With always "do" and "pray"?

You know I never loved you, John;
 No fault of mine made me your toast:
 Why will you haunt me with a face as wan
 As shows an hour-old ghost?

I dare say Meg or Moll would take
 Pity upon you, if you'd ask:
 And pray don't remain single for my sake
 Who can't perform that task.

I have no heart?—Perhaps I have not;
 But then you're mad to take offence
 That I don't give you what I have not got:
 Use your common sense.

Let bygones be bygones:
 Don't call me false, who owed not to be true:
 I'd rather answer "No" to fifty Johns
 Than answer "Yes" to you.

Let's mar our pleasant days no more,
 Song-birds of passage, days of youth:
 Catch at to-day, forget the days before:
 I'll wink at your untruth.

Let us strike hands as hearty friends;
 No more, no less; and friendship's good:
 Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
 And points not understood

In open treaty. Rise above
 Quibbles and shuffling off and on:
 Here's friendship for you if you like; but love,—
 No thank you, John.

"Up-Hill"

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
 Yes, to the very end.
 Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
 From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
 A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
 May not the darkness hide it from my face?
 You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
 Those who have gone before.
 Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
 They will not keep you standing at that door.
 Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.
 Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
 Yea, beds for all who come.

"Song"

When I am dead, my dearest,
 Sing no sad songs for me;
 Plant thou no roses at my head,
 Nor shady cypress tree:
 Be the green grass above me
 With showers and dewdrops wet;
 And if thou wilt, remember,
 And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
 I shall not feel the rain;
 I shall not hear the nightingale
 Sing on, as if in pain:
 And dreaming through the twilight
 That doth not rise nor set,
 Haply I may remember,
 And haply may forget.

"What Are Heavy?"

What are heavy? sea-sand and sorrow:
 What are brief? to-day and to-morrow:
 What are frail? Spring blossoms and youth:
 What are deep? the ocean and truth.

LEWIS CARROLL [born CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON] (1832–1898)

"The Walrus and the Carpenter"



The sun was shining on the sea,
 Shining with all his might:
 He did his very best to make
 The billows smooth and bright—
 And this was odd, because it was
 The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,
 Because she thought the sun
 Had got no business to be there
 After the day was done—
 "It's very rude of him," she said,
 "To come and spoil the fun."

The sea was wet as wet could be,
 The sands were dry as dry.
 You could not see a cloud, because
 No cloud was in the sky:
 No birds were flying overhead—
 There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
 Were walking close at hand:
 They wept like anything to see
 Such quantities of sand:
 "If this were only cleared away,"
 They said, it *would* be grand!

"If seven maids with seven mops

Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose," the Walrus said,
That they could get it clear?"
"I doubt it," said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

"O Oysters, come and walk with us!"
The Walrus did beseech.
"A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach:
We cannot do with more than four,
To give a hand to each."

The eldest Oyster looked at him,
But never a word he said:
The eldest Oyster winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head—
Meaning to say he did not choose
To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,
All eager for the treat:
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,
Their shoes were clean and neat—
And this was odd, because, you know,
They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more, and more, and more—
All hopping through the frothy waves,

And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter

Walked on a mile or so,

And then they rested on a rock

Conveniently low:

And all the little Oysters stood

And waited in a row.

"The time has come," the Walrus said,

To talk of many things:

Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—

Of cabbages—and kings—

And why the sea is boiling hot—

And whether pigs have wings."

"But wait a bit," the Oysters cried,

"Before we have our chat;

For some of us are out of breath,

And all of us are fat!"

"No hurry!" said the Carpenter.

They thanked him much for that.

"A loaf of bread," the Walrus said,

Is what we chiefly need:

Pepper and vinegar besides

Are very good indeed—

Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,

We can begin to feed."

"But not on us!" the Oysters cried,

Turning a little blue.

After such kindness, that would be

A dismal thing to do!"

"The night is fine," the Walrus said.

"Do you admire the view?"

"It was so kind of you to come!

And you are very nice!"

The Carpenter said nothing but

"Cut us another slice.

I wish you were not quite so deaf—

I've had to ask you twice!"

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,

"To play them such a trick,

After we've brought them out so far,

And made them trot so quick!"

The Carpenter said nothing but

"The butter's spread too thick!"

"I weep for you," the Walrus said:

"I deeply sympathize."

With sobs and tears he sorted out

Those of the largest size,

Holding his pocket-handkerchief

Before his streaming eyes.

"O Oysters," said the Carpenter,

"You've had a pleasant run!

Shall we be trotting home again?"

But answer came there none—

And this was scarcely odd, because

They'd eaten every one.