

The Stages of Life, Caspar David Friedrich, Museum der Bildenden Kunst, Leipzig

1 2 FROM *In Memoriam, A.H.H.*
ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

4 ▲ **Critical Viewing**
This painting, *The Stages of Life*, suggests that life is like a voyage. How would the speaker in the poem react to such a comparison? Explain.
SPECULATE

1
I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers' tones,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

5 But who shall so forecast the years
And find in loss a gain to match?
Or reach a hand through time to catch
The far-off interest of tears?

1. *divers* (dī' verz) *adj.* varied; having many parts.

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned,
Let darkness keep her raven gloss.
Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,
To dance with death, to beat the ground,
Than that the victor Hours should scorn
The long result of love, and boast,
"Behold the man that loved and lost,
But all he was is overworn."

7

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,
5 A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.
25 He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly through the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

82

I wage not any feud with Death
For changes wrought on form and face;
No lower life that earth's embrace
May breed with him, can fright my faith.
6 Eternal process moving on,
From state to state the spirit walks;
And these are but the shattered stalks,
Or ruined **chrysalis** of one.
Nor blame I Death, because he bare
The use of virtue out of earth;
I know transplanted human worth
Will bloom to profit, elsewhere.
40 For this alone on Death I wreak
The wrath that garners in my heart;
He put our lives so far apart
We cannot hear each other speak.

He put our lives so far apart
We cannot hear each other speak.


The Speaker in Poetry
What do you learn about the speaker in lines 21–24?

Analyzing Philosophical Beliefs
In lines 29–44, what does the poet suggest about the consolations of faith and philosophy?

Vocabulary
chrysalis (kris' l is)
n. the third stage in the development of a moth or butterfly

7 **Comprehension**
What are two of the main feelings Tennyson conveys in these stanzas?

from *In Memoriam, A.H.H.* **961**




I prosper, circled with thy voice;
I shall not lose thee though I die.

Vocabulary

diffusive (di fyoo' siv) *adj.*
tending to spread out

prosper (pras' par) *v.*
thrive

130



45 Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

50 What art thou then? I cannot guess;
But though I seem in star and flower
To feel thee some **diffusive** power,
I do not therefore love thee less.

55 My love involves the love before;
My love is vaster passion now;
Though mixed with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more.

60 Far off thou art, but ever nigh;
I have thee still, and I rejoice;
I **prosper**, circled with thy voice;
I shall not lose thee though I die.



8 The Lady of SHALOTT

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

PART I

9
5 On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold¹ and meet the sky;
And through the field the road runs by
To many-towered Camelot,²
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow³
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.

1. wold rolling plains.

2. Camelot legendary English town where King Arthur had his court and Round Table.

3. blow bloom.



The Lady of Shalott, (detail), John Waterhouse, The Tate Gallery, London

The Speaker in Poetry

What does setting this poem in the days of King Arthur suggest about the poet's attitude toward the past?



The Lady of Shalott, John Waterhouse, The Tate Gallery, London

11 ▲ Critical Viewing

What symbols of the Lady of Shalott's occupation and eventual fate are in this painting? Explain why they are significant. **INTERPRET**

By the margin, willow-veiled,
 20 Slide the heavy barges trailed
 By slow horses; and unhailed
 The shallop⁴ 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?

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."

4. shallop light, open boat.

PART II

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
 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.

And moving through a mirror⁵ clear
 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,⁶
 And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

55 Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
 An abbot on an ambling pad,⁷
 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.

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.

5. mirror Weavers placed mirrors in front of their looms, so that they could view the progress of their work.

6. churls (churly) n. farm laborers; peasants.

7. pad easy-paced horse.



12 The Speaker in Poetry

Is the speaker who tells the Lady of Shalott's story also a character in the poem? How can you tell?

13 Comprehension

What does the Lady of Shalott do with her time?

14 The BRITISH TRADITION

A Crisis of Faith

When the grief-stricken Tennyson of *In Memoriam* pushes away the comforting philosophies of his day, or when he turns to the mythic past in “The Lady of Shalott,” he reflects a broader crisis of faith that rocked Victorian society. The Industrial Revolution and its teeming urban masses had pushed aside the traditional bond between peasant and lord. The comfortable rhythms of a farming society had given way to surging spirals of economic boom and bust. Meanwhile, such intellectual developments as Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged religious beliefs.

In the midst of these social and intellectual changes, Victorian artists asked whether their cultural resources—religion, science, art—were still sufficient to guide their lives. From Tennyson to Matthew Arnold to T. S. Eliot to Philip Larkin, the theme of a fractured culture, unable to answer its own questions, persists to this day.

Connect to the Literature

In what way might the isolated Lady of Shalott find the sight of Sir Lancelot a crisis of faith?



PART III

A bow-shot from her bower eaves,
He rode between the barley sheaves,
75 The sun came dazzling through the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves⁸
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight⁹ forever kneeled
To a lady in his shield,
80 That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy¹⁰ bridle glittered free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.¹¹
85 The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazoned baldric¹² 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.

15
100 His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed;
On burnish’d 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,
“Tirra lirra,” by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

8. **greaves** armor that protects the legs below the kneecaps.

9. **red-cross knight** refers to the Redcrosse Knight from *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser. The knight is a symbol of holiness.

10. **gemmy** jeweled.

11. **Galaxy** the Milky Way.

12. **blazoned baldric** decorated sash worn diagonally across the chest.

110 She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the waterlily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
115 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.

PART IV

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 boathead wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

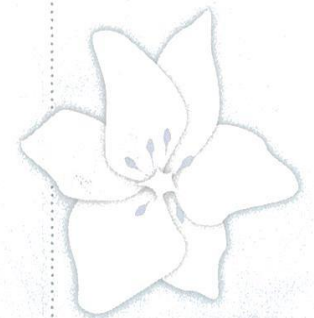
145 Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darkened wholly,
Turned to towered Camelot.

16 The Speaker in Poetry

How does the speaker create the sense that a decisive moment has arrived?

Vocabulary

waning (wān’ in) *v.* gradually becoming dimmer or weaker



17 Comprehension

What does the Lady of Shalott do once she sees Sir Lancelot?



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."

18 TEARS, *Idle* TEARS

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

BACKGROUND *The Princess* (1847) is a long narrative poem that contains a number of songs. Some of these songs, including the one that follows, are considered to be among the finest of Tennyson's lyrics.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
5 And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
10 So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
15 So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
20 O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

19 Comprehension

What is the speaker's reaction to the thought of "the days that are no more"?

Ulysses

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

970 Progress and Decline (1833–1901)

BACKGROUND In this poem, Tennyson extends the story of Ulysses (yoo'lis'ez'), the hero of Homer's epic the *Odyssey*. Homer's writing ends after Ulysses' triumphant return home to Ithaca. Years later, Tennyson tells us, the hero has grown restless. Although he had been away for twenty long years—ten fighting in the Trojan War and another ten on a long and adventure-filled voyage back—Ulysses finds that he is contemplating yet another journey.

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole¹
Unequal² laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees.³ All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades⁴
Vexed the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honored of them all—
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world, whose
margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,

1. mete and dole measure and give out.

2. unequal unfair.

3. lees sediment.

4. Hyades (hi' ə dəz') group of stars whose rising was assumed to be followed by rain.

22 The Speaker in Poetry

Who is speaking the words of this poem? How can you tell?

23 Critical Viewing

Compare the character of Ulysses conveyed by this painting with the speaker in the poem. **COMPARE AND CONTRAST**

24 Comprehension

What has Ulysses encountered on his travels?

25 Analyzing Philosophical Beliefs

What do lines 22-32 suggest about Tennyson's philosophical beliefs?

Vocabulary

prudence (prōōd' ns) *n.* careful management of resources; economy

Vocabulary

furrows (fur' ōz) *n.* narrow grooves, such as those made by a plow

30 ↑
25 And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

35 This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the scepter and the isle⁵
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, by slow **prudence** to make mild
A rugged people, and through soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centered in the sphere
40 Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet⁶ adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
45 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toiled and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
50 Old age hath yet his honor and his toil;
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
55 The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding **furrows**; for my purpose holds

5. **isle** Ithaca, an island off the coast of Greece.

6. **meet** appropriate.

HOW DULL IT IS TO PAUSE, TO MAKE AN END,
TO RUST UNBURNISHED, NOT TO **SHINE IN USE!**

60 | To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
26 | It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,⁷
And see the great Achilles,⁸ whom we knew.
65 | Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
70 | To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

7. **Happy Isles** Elysium, or the Islands of the Blessed: in classical mythology, the place heroes went after death.

8. **Achilles** (ə kil' ēz') Greek hero of the Trojan War.