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Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann

Sabine Schülting

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The Evolution of Romanticism:

High Art vs. Popular Culture in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"

Even in our supposedly "postmodern" times aesthetic value judgements still seem to rely chiefly on late 18th and early 19th century ideas about the value and legitimacy of subjective experience and expression. What is more, and in spite of all differences, this observation seems to cover the reception of both the most aesthetically self-conscious works of contemporary art *and* of various forms of popular culture. The philosophical and aesthetic codification of the semantic paradigms underlying this diversity has commonly been traced under the heading of "Romanticism,"¹ and the results have been plentiful but somewhat contradictory: Romanticism has at times been described as morbid and healthy, critical and affirmative, revolutionary and escapist, radical and conservative, aestheticist and political, historicist and mystical, to name just a few of the oppositions discernible in recent surveys of the field (Ferguson 1992; Curran 1993; Day 1996). So far, the ensuing terminological blur can at least be credited with having generated memorable instances of rhetorical resignation such as, for example, the following passage from the 1993 *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*:

[A]s the currents of traditional literary criticism and scholarship in recent years have drawn increasing sophistication from new philosophical and historical inquiries, the problem of contemporary definition has been exacerbated – or perhaps rendered obsolete. (Curran 1993: xiii)

Similarly, Aidan Day's recent monograph in Routledge's *New Critical Idiom* series states wearily that "any [...] attempts to summarize Romanticism inevitably end up over-systematizing and simplifying the phenomenon" (Day 1996: 5).

Nevertheless, the approach outlined in this paper clings to the legitimacy and necessity of systematizing in a scholarly context. At the same time, it will be aware of the self-reflexive turn which has lately acknowledged Romanticism's formative influence on literary criticism. The problem of the persistence of what Jerome McGann has termed *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) – not only in the 'real' world, but also and perhaps especially in the discourse of literary studies and literary theory – will be countered by employing a theoretical frame capable of accounting for the evolution of the semantic paradigms in question. Accordingly, the first part of the paper will deal with the roles of Romanticism in modern society. To illustrate these theoretical points,

1 For an account of the importance of *retrospective* evaluation in the construction of Romanticism cf. Perkins (1990).

the second part will then turn to Tennyson's famous poem "The Lady of Shalott", first published in 1832 and then once more, heavily revised, in 1842. It is certainly tempting to locate the first version pointedly at the end of Romanticism, marked in this case by the death of Sir Walter Scott and the passing of the First Reform Bill, while the second version could be seen as early Victorian, or early post-Romantic (cf., for example, Thomas 1990). But even more importantly, "The Lady of Shalott" has been enormously influential in both high art *and* popular culture to this day.² It is certainly one of the most interesting examples available for tracing the evolution of Romanticism.

1. *Romanticism in Modern Society*

Perhaps the only aspect of Romanticism that has never been seriously contested is its being part and parcel of processes of modernization. Still, the question remains whether the emergence of Romanticism served to fuel or to absorb the complex dynamics of modern society, and it seems that the only plausible answer is to view Romanticism as a double-edged phenomenon. In order to untangle this parcel of seemingly contradictory, but nevertheless specifically modern functions it might be useful to turn to one of the most inclusive and advanced theories of modernity on offer, Niklas Luhmann's brand of sociological systems theory (Luhmann 1995a; Müller 1994; Schwanzitz 1995). From this vantage point Romanticism becomes a fundamental concept of modern culture or cultural modernity, because, as Luhmann puts it in his attempt at a systems-theoretical "Redescription of 'Romantic Art,'"

Romanticism discovered its own autonomy and realized and worked through what had already taken place historically, namely the social differentiation of a functional system specifically related to art. [...] Romanticism was modern and still is [...] because it attempts to endure system autonomy.³

In a rather unobtrusive way, these remarks point to central features of Luhmann's theory. Luhmann describes the formation of modern society as an irreversible movement from the principle of social stratification to the new principle of functional differentiation and he locates the final stages of this development in the eighteenth century. In

2 There are direct reworkings in 20th century poems such as Elizabeth Bishop's "The Gentleman of Shalott" (1936) or Veronica Forrest-Thomson's "The Lady of Shalott: Ode" (1976) as well as explicit and elaborate references in works of fiction such as Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) or Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River* (1978). In the 19th century, the poem's resonance was pervasive, as can be seen in traces of its theme and symbolism throughout the Victorian novel (cf. Gribble 1983) and in its role as a favourite subject in the visual arts, especially with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (cf., for example, Lottes 1988 and Leng 1991). On the Arthurian revival of the first half of the 19th century cf. Simpson (1990). As Herbert Tucker remarks in his aptly titled 1988 study *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, it was in "the hands of the foremost Victorian iconographers, that the poem 'passed [...] into the public domain - where it still enjoys a kind of shadow life in the higher pop culture'" (1988: 99).

3 Luhmann (1996a: 507). For a critical view of systems-theoretical (re-)descriptions of Romanticism, which have so far been offered by Luhmann himself (s.a.) and Gerhard Plumpe (cf., for example, 1995: 65-104), see de Berg (1997: 13-24).

Luhmann's terms modern society 'is' a system of communications that reproduce themselves autopoietically. Historically speaking, this evolutionary process has led to the formation of autonomous functional subsystems of communication such as, for example, science, economy, politics, law, education, art, etc. Culturally speaking, the most important effect of this fundamental structural change is the radically new realization of Man's relation to society. As Luhmann points out, the modern individual can no longer rely on her or his place *in* society to provide stable markers of identity. Instead, society can only be approached from the *outside*, so to speak, and the identity of the individual has to be formed in complex multi-contextual processes of socialization in those newly differentiated spheres of communication. It should be obvious that this approach opens up fresh perspectives on some core topics of Romanticism, such as subject/subjectivity, idealism, or, of course, the emerging autonomy of art and literature.

In adapting Luhmann's approach for literary studies, it seems most fruitful to focus on the term *Sirni*, which is commonly but not quite adequately translated as 'meaning'.⁴ Meaning holds a central position in the architecture of Luhmann's theory as the common operational factor of both psychic and social systems, i.e. consciousness and communication, respectively. In spite of his emphasis on communication (and in contrast to widespread prejudice against him), Luhmann views the emergence and evolution of modern society as an effect of the co-evolution of psychic and social systems in reciprocal interdependence. Technically, Luhmann's concept of autopoietically reproductive communication relies on a functional concept of meaning. Meaning in this sense is synonymous with the operational autonomy of a system: everything which contributes to the continuation of a system's specific communication is meaningful, and meaning in this sense cannot be negated without destroying the system's existence. On this level, each of the autonomous subsystems of modern society imposes a symbolically generalized and specifically coded (i.e. binarily schematized) medium of communication on those media which are generally available such as language, writing, printing, and, of late, the electronic media (examples: money regulating +/- ownership in the economic system, publications putting forward +/- truth in the science system, works of art providing +/- interesting entertainment in the literary system). Thus, each system demarcates the boundaries of its specific realm by providing markers for connective attribution, and as a result the continuation of its specific communication should become more likely.

Where does all this leave meaning in its traditional sense? It could be argued that Luhmann's functional concept of meaning provides the frame for a systematic redescription of traditional concepts of meaning. Each social system establishes its very own functionally motivated horizon of meaning, and this precondition governs the availability of content-based or semantic dimensions of meaning within the system. Paradoxically, these are more often than not at least partly attributed to the system's environment in spite of the fact that they are brought about exclusively by the system's specific processes of meaning production, which are just triggered by environmental impulses. In this respect, meaning construction becomes a matter of attribution with basically

4 For a detailed discussion of the systems-theoretical model of modern literary communication drawn upon in the following paragraph cf. Reinfandt (1997b). For outlines of the basic ideas in English cf. Reinfandt (1995, 1997a).

three options: on the one hand, meaning can be 'imported' from the system's environment, thus acquiring an aura of 'objectivity' or subjectivity, depending on whether it is attributed to a social or a psychic source. On the other hand, a system can acknowledge its own role in constructing and processing meaning on the level of self-observation and self-description, thus adding a reflexive dimension to meanings of any kind. On a large scale this arrangement of 'objective', subjective, and reflexive dimensions of meaning can be observed in the fundamental epistemological paradigms of modernity (which could be labelled enlightenment, idealism, and historicism, respectively), but it is also at work within the confines of functional subsystems (like art and literature) and their programmatic discursive formations (like Romanticism).

In the light of these ideas modern literary communication can be described as a historically variable convention of communication which specializes in negotiating modern culture's emerging threefold horizon of meaning in a flexible, integrative and, last but not least, entertaining way. On the content level, literature mediates between the persisting and insistent claims of 'objectivity' put forth by science, politics, economy etc. on the one hand, and the pervasiveness of subjective experience on the other. It does so by processing written texts as works of art, thus establishing its specific reflexive dimension as an inducement to formal innovation. Romanticism, then, was the first programmatic realization of this new type of communication, establishing its basic features such as, for example, the asymmetric mode of inclusion which distinguishes between actively socialized literary professionals (writers/artists) and passively socialized readers (who can either be amateurs or actively socialized in a different social system such as literary studies). Semantically speaking, this arrangement and the resulting literary emphasis on subjective experience resulted in a fairly smooth transition from traditional mimetic-pragmatic orientations to a complete emancipation of literature's socially conditioned progressive functional autonomy. However, at this early stage, and especially in England,⁵ the autonomy of Romantic art was primarily realized as a compensatory semantics postulating artistic freedom of expression on the basis of the emphatically embraced autonomy of the individual subject.⁶

It is nevertheless interesting to observe that the emerging semantics of subjectivity and autonomy were perceived from fairly early on to be slightly at odds with each other in spite of this initial conflation.⁷ It should be profitable, therefore, to approach the evolution of Romanticism from this angle. Broadly speaking, the ensuing processes of

5 This goes especially for English Romanticism (cf. Bode 1998). Early German Romanticism, on the other hand, shows an astonishingly high degree of reflexivity, especially in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, which introduces fully developed reflexive concepts like Romantic criticism and Romantic irony.

6 It seems to be this tradition which provokes Luhmann's statement that "Romanticism [...] attempts to *endure* system autonomy" (s.a., 1996a: 507, my emphasis). Here he veers from his otherwise strictly functional perspective and hints at the needs of psychic systems behind Romanticism.

7 This problem seems to be at the heart of Coleridge's famous critique of Wordsworth's theory of diction as formulated in one of the founding documents of English Romanticism, the "Preface" to the 1800 ed. of the *Lyrical Ballads* (cf. *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 17).

modern literature's specialization and institutionalization have been characterized by a movement towards a full realization of reflexive dimensions of meaning. This development has effectively bracketed the erstwhile dominance of subjectivity, but subjective dimensions of meaning have nevertheless retained their prominence in organizing the system's negotiation of increasingly contradictory 'objective' dimensions of meaning 'imported' from religion, politics, economy, law or other newly autonomous spheres of communication. Consequently, these tensions have often been dealt with in terms of morality, and Luhmann suggests that moral as a sphere of communication is exempted from the principle of functional differentiation because its code (esteem vs. lack of esteem) and the underlying distinction good vs. bad refer to persons in whatever social context (Luhmann 1996b). Interestingly, a similar processing of subjective dimensions of meaning 'unbracketed' by functionally differentiated reflexivity seems to be the central feature of popular culture in modern society,⁸ and it is here that Romantic notions like the ideal of authenticity in (seemingly) spontaneous expression and the moral value of sincerity attached to it have survived to this day. In this sphere, as one critic has pointed out concerning rock music, "Romanticism is a living popular creed, not a superannuated artistic movement; [...] this creed, originally the province of an educated minority, is now by mutation the ideological currency of the Western masses" (Pattison 1987: 30).

2. *Ladies of Shalott*

All these rather sweeping claims can be illustrated with the help of Tennyson's famous poem "The Lady of Shalott". The following sketch will compare the 1832 and 1842 versions of the poem in terms of their affinities with the evolution of high art in the course of the 19th century. It will then contrast this with popular culture concerns by discussing the musical setting of an abridged version of the 1842 text that can be found on the highly successful folk-pop album *The Visit* by the Canadian-born celtic-styled singer and harp player Loreena McKennitt.

In both versions of the poem,⁹ the plot remains basically the same. A brief summary will be enough to point out its strong emphasis on an allegorical treatment of the relationship between art and life:¹⁰ In an Arthurian setting, the enigmatic lady of the poem's title inhabits the river island of Shalott (part I, 4 stanzas). Inside a castle she weaves a magic web under an unspecified curse which forbids her to stop in order to look directly at the world outside. Nevertheless she can see fragments of the world in the mirror hanging in front of her, which, incidentally, not a poetic device but a realistic feature of a loom, allowing the weaver to see the results of her work. After an eternity of contented weaving, (mirror) images of love and marriage make her restless (part II, 4 stanzas). When famous Lancelot passes by, she finally turns from her weaving and the mirror cracks (part III, 5 stanzas). She gets into a boat in order to float down to

8 For a similar argument from a non-systems-theoretical perspective cf. Novitz (1989).

9 A convenient parallel printing of both versions is provided as an appendix to this paper.

10 This is the most obvious approach to the poem and fairly common in traditional Tennyson criticism. See, for example, Alaya (1970).

Camelot, but she dies before she reaches the town and becomes a strange spectacle for its inhabitants (part IV: 7/6 stanzas, 1832/1842).

Similarly, there are no changes in the general formal outline, which relies on a ballad-like 3rd person narrative stance and introduces a shift from the present tense of eternal innocence to the past tense of experience in the middle of the final stanza in part II (l. 68).¹¹ In spite of its overall narrative orientation, however, the poem sports a highly individual formal design that combines lyrical elaboration and the sensual dimension of persistent assonance in an intricate rhyme scheme >aaaa-b-ccc-b<, with b functioning as a kind of refrain. Throughout the poem, "Camelot" is placed firmly at the centre and "Shalott" at the margin or end of each stanza, and both yield to "Lancelot" once: in the first stanza of part III, which leads up to the turning point, Lancelot replaces Camelot as the centre of the poem's world (l. 77), and in the last but one stanza of the same part, Lancelot replaces Shalott immediately before the lady destroys her habitat by turning towards him (l. 108).

What, then, are the differences between the two versions that might explain why the long process of revision was necessary and worthwhile?¹² Both versions open with a view of "long fields of barley and of rye" (l. 2) surrounding the road to busy "many-towered Camelot" (l. 5), but then the 1832 text turns away from these images of agriculture and power towards the self-sufficient world of nature "round about Shalott" (l. 9) in which there are just waterlilies and reflections of "daffodilies" (sic) trembling in the water (ll. 6-8). In the 1832 version, part I, which functions as an exposition, ends with an affirmative statement of the island's isolation from the world: "The little isle is all inrailed/ [...] with a rose fence [...]; by the marge unhailed/The shallow fitteth silken-sailed/Skimming down to Camelot" (ll. 28-31). On the island, in her castle, the lady lives "royally apparelléd" (l. 34), without any regard for the outside world. In 1842, on the other hand, the poem turns its attention to the people passing by on the road to Camelot. These people are "Gazing where the lilies blow/Round [...]/The island of Shalott" (ll. 6-9), thus making the self-sufficient world of 1832 available for the outside perspective that dominates part I in 1842. Accordingly, the new version marks Camelot more clearly as a world of commerce by supplementing the shallow passing by to Camelot with "heavy barges trailed/By slow horses" (ll. 20-21). Nevertheless, this world has retained an interest in idylls¹³ of nature, if only subconsciously, so to speak, so that in 1842 the final lines of the original, celebrating the splendid isolation of the lady (ll. 33-36), are replaced by the following enigmatic questions which seem to address the reader: "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?" (ll. 24-27) In addition to this replacement, the 1842 version switches the positions of stanzas 3 and 4 so that the end

11 Textual references are to Tennyson, *Rioks*, ed. (1987). The parallel texts provided in the appendix follow this edition which gives numbered lines for the 1842 version and provides the different or additional lines of the 1832 version in footnotes to this numbering.

12 A still useful systematic survey of Tennyson's revisions in his notorious "Ten Years' Silence" between 1832 and 1842 is provided in Green (1951), who also speculates about possible biographical reasons.

13 On Tennyson's use of the ancient genre of idyll, both in "The Lady of Shalott" and throughout his *oeuvre*, cf. Pattison (1979).

of the new exposition is focused on points of contact between Shalott and Camelot. At the same time, however, the new ending on the reaper's awed whisper "Tis the fairy/Lady of Shalott" (ll. 35-36) – uttered in "uplands airy" (l. 34), and not, as in 1832, right next to the castle – stresses the distance between Shalott and Camelot, and it is certainly no accident that the solitary reaper (l) of 1832, who hears the lady "ever chanting cheerily/Like an angel, singing clearly" (ll. 20-22), is now replaced by a group of reapers who hear just the echo of her song (ll. 28-30). All in all, it seems fair to state that Tennyson's reworking of part I aimed at an elimination of some stock elements of Romanticism such as the immediate experience of nature and the sublime in solitary repose or at least while doing simple, unalienated, rustic work. Instead, the new version stresses the strange mixture of attraction and unattainability that characterizes the relationship between Camelot and Shalott, or perhaps, to put it bluntly, society and Romanticism.

This tendency is confirmed in part II. The 1832 version presents the web the lady is weaving passively as "charméd" and implies that the otherworldly source of this charm is also the source of the curse (ll. 38-39). In 1842, however, she weaves "A magic web with colours gay" (l. 38), while the curse is attributed to an unspecified whisper which nevertheless points back to the reaper's whisper at the end of part I, thus implying that the world of Camelot may have its part in it. Furthermore, the 1832 text states unequivocally that the lady has "no other care" (l. 44) and underlines the absolute-ness of her isolation by stating that "She lives with little joy or fear" surrounded by rural images of running waters and tinkling sheepbells (ll. 46-48). The 1842 version, on the other hand, hints at a potential openness of her situation by modifying this to "little other care hath she" (l. 44). When the mirror is introduced, the 1832 version emphasizes its reflecting function (l. 50) and remains firmly with the lady ("as the mazy web she whirls,/She sees the surly village churls [...]", ll. 52-53), while the 1842 text speaks less specifically of "Shadows of the world" (l. 48) and then moves seemingly out to the highway "Winding down to Camelot" (l. 50) without further reference to either the mirror or the lady: "There the river eddy whirls,/And there the surly village churls./And the red cloaks of market girls,/Pass onward from Shalott" (ll. 51-54; 53-54 identical in 1832, my emphasis). The theme of sexuality hinted at here (cf. Piassa 1992) is then developed in two largely unrevised stanzas. The first of these focuses on love among the lower orders (ll. 55-59) on the one hand and courtly love (ll. 60-63) on the other, and it is the latter section which points at things to come in a characteristically double-edged way: only here is the reader reminded of the secondary or possibly illusory status of the mirror images described in the text (cf. l. 60), and at the same time the lady's lack of love is explicitly acknowledged ("She hath no loyal knight and true", l. 62) before the poem's focus returns to her castle. The final stanza of part II starts with an affirmation of the lady's position and suggests that the web she weaves is a positive alternative to the ultimate reality of death, as represented by a funeral procession passing by outside the castle. However, the switch from present tense to past tense takes place in this context (l. 68), shortly before the appearance of "two young lovers lately wed" (l. 70) makes the lady realize that the web might be a negative alternative to the realities of love and marriage. Even so, she is not yet completely alienated from her existence, but her first direct utterance "I am half sick of shadows" (l. 71, my emphasis) paves the way for the turning point in part III.

It takes a Lancelot to bring this about, and Lancelot seems to have been a lifelong preoccupation of Tennyson who vacillated between fascination and rejection (Goslee 1989). From the context of "The Lady of Shalott", the first poem in which Lancelot is introduced, it should be clear that Camelot functions as an allegorical stand-in for modern society and that Lancelot occupies a central position in this world as its ultimate representative. In view of these observations it is interesting to note that part III of the poem remains largely unrevised except for the fact that in 1832 Lancelot comes from Camelot while in 1842 he is on his way to Camelot (cf. ll. 86, 95, 104). What is more, this change is prefigured at the end of part II, where the movement of the funeral procession is modified accordingly (l. 68), and, of course, these revised movements prefigure the lady's ultimate movement in part IV. It could be said that in 1832 Camelot functions as a remote source of attacks on the lady's self-sufficient mode of existence, while in 1842 it has become an irresistible point of attraction in which the poem must culminate out of internal necessity.

In fact, part IV opens with just this switch of focus in both versions: portentous autumn weather has replaced the quiet and clear summer atmosphere of the preceding stanzas, and the poem's perspective is directly aimed at the skies "Over towered Camelot" (ll. 118-122). After this opening, however, Tennyson left hardly a line untouched. The 1832 version insists on the contrast between inside and "outside" (l. 123), where the lady finds a boat "lay[ing] afloat" (l. 124), and even in an act of naming obviously aimed at the outside world she insists on keeping up a link with her origins by designating herself in writing as *The Lady of Shalott* on the stern of her boat (ll. 125-126). See also, implausibly, 161-162). In 1842, on the other hand, she comes down from her tower to find a boat "left afloat" (implying, of course, other people), and writes her designation on the prow (ll. 123-126, leading to, more plausibly, 161-162) so that this version puts a much stronger emphasis on the aspect of "coming" instead of the former emphasis of "going" or "leaving". In fact, the 1832 text defiantly recurs to the lady's royal stance as described at the end of part I in the very next stanza, which does not appear in the revised text at all. Here images of queenlyness and innocence are summoned and the lady literally takes her stand with "Her wide eyes fixed on Camelot" (l. 131). What remains of this in 1842 has been toned down to mere innocence, and instead of standing in Shalott she is by now lying in her boat (cf. 1832: n126/l. 8, 1842: 136) and driven by external circumstances. When the later version reaches this point, the 1832 text digresses to enhance the lady's aura of mystery by reference to the exotic phenomenon of the song of the dying swan as witnessed by sailors in remote regions (ll. 136-41), thus again affirming the lady's extra-real status. When she finally dies, shortly before she reaches the first houses of Camelot, only the 1842 text hints at possible external reasons when it mentions that "her blood was frozen slowly" (l. 147). At this point, both versions converge again to insist on the link between death and song (cf. l. 152), but afterwards the 1832 text is much more drastic in its emphasis on death ("A pale, pale corpse she floated by/Deadcold between the houses high,/Dead into towered Camelot." vs. 1842 "A gleaming shape she floated by,/A corse between the houses high/Silent into Camelot." ll. 156-158).

After this climax, the poem ends with a description of the reaction of Camelot's inhabitants. These are, however, not identical in 1832 and 1842, and, what is more, they do not react to the same spectacle. In 1832, all kinds of people witness the lady's arrival,

puzzled and fearful but nevertheless open to the possibility of her being a blessing rather than a curse¹⁴ (ll. 163-164/167). Here, the lady herself has the last word and alleviates their fears by having placed a "parchment on her breast" (l. 165) reading "*The web was woven curiously/The charm is broken utterly/Draw near and fear not - this is I,/The Lady of Shalott*" (ll. 168-171). It is tempting to read this simply as a defiant restatement of her autonomy, but it is much more than that. It is also a statement of her liberation from the charm that constrained her, and in death she seems to have attained an emphatic and empathetic subjectivity that was not available in her erstwhile self-sufficiency. It is important to note that her final "I" (l. 170) is placed in an extremely artificial way in order to achieve a striking deviation from the elaborate rhyme scheme which is quite strictly adhered to in the rest of the poem, and even more importantly, this deviation foregrounds an additional rhyme between "not" (l. 170) and "Shalott" (l. 171). What the 1832 version emphatically embraces, then, is not only the autonomy of art, but also the autonomy of the individual subject who can use art as an ultimate mode of self-expression combined with a "claim to enter language and social identity" (Sinfield 1986: 68).

The 1842 version, on the other hand, is much more resigned (and much less "Romantic") in its outlook. Starting with questions of puzzlement which leave the descriptive narrative mode and involve the reader (l. 163), thus pointing back to ll. 24-27, the final stanza of the 1842 text concentrates on the uncomprehending and fearful reaction of the knights (ll. 164-167) before granting the privilege of the last word to Lancelot, who is at once representative and special ("*But Lancelot mused a little space*" l. 168, my emphasis). What he finally says can be regarded as the epitome of conventionalality, combining outward appearance ("She has a lovely face" l. 169) with standardized religious phrase ("God in his mercy lend her grace" l. 170), and its primary function seems to be the social containment of autonomy, both aesthetic and subjective. When compared to the earlier version, the 1842 text can certainly be read as a symptom of an increasing awareness of the limits of art, but it nevertheless makes its point about the existential relevance of aesthetic experience. Accordingly, readings of the poem have ever since oscillated between an emphasis on the domestication inherent in the 'objectivity'/subjectivity-relation on the one hand and an emphasis on the emancipatory potential inherent in the subjectivity/autonomy-relation on the other hand (Albright 1986: 31-38; Cervo 1982; Colley 1985; Jordan 1988: 56-62; Joseph 1987; Martin 1973; Shannon 1981).

In this respect, Tennyson's revision of "The Lady of Shalott" can be interpreted as an indicator of the movement from a poetics of Romanticism emphasizing processes of social differentiation towards a poetics of realism emphasizing aspects of interference between differentiated social spheres.¹⁵ In following this new orientation, realism

14 All in all, however, the poem remains ambiguous in this respect. Cf., for example, the excellent reading in Chadwick (1986).

15 Realism, in this sense, "emerges from Romanticism by a process of natural development of central Romantic ideas [i.e. its emphasis on the subjectivity/autonomy-complex, C.R.] under the influence of new social forces [i.e. a more "realistic" assessment of the "objectivity"/subjectivity-complex, C.R.]" (Williams 1974: xii-xiii). Accordingly, the results remain more or less ambiguous, and, like Romanticism, realism has been interpreted both

presupposes the achievements of Romanticism, but it is also sceptical about the effects autonomous art may achieve in 'real' life. It is to the poem's lasting credit that it does not take refuge in half-heartedly embraced morality as an alternative to art, as did its much reviled companion piece "The Palace of Art", whose chief interest today is pathological, as Herbert Tucker (among others) has pointed out (Tucker 1988: 118; Cadbury 1965; Cronin 1993). Instead, the 1842 version of "The Lady of Shalott" endures system autonomy by remaining ambiguous in its 'modern', self-consciously artificial creation of a myth,¹⁶ hovering as it does between an acknowledgement of affirmation by containment on the one hand and an insistence on the existence of an aesthetic "beyond" on the other. This ambiguity has turned out to be equally appealing to self-confidently self-conscious, specialized and institutionalized varieties of modernist high art *and* to widely favoured and less exclusive forms of popular culture (Storey 1993: 1-19) not so much concerned with their own evolutionary status within a clearly demarcated sphere of communication.

In order to point out some differences between the two spheres we can now turn to Loreena McKennitt's popular musical setting of the poem. McKennitt uses the 1842 text,¹⁷ omitting one stanza from parts I, II and IV, respectively, and two stanzas from part III. As the recording of the remaining 14 stanzas already covers a sumptuous 11 minutes, this abridgement can certainly be put down to purely practical reasons. But still, a choice had to be made, and it is interesting to note that all the descriptive passages omitted from parts I to III refer *not* to the lady but rather to the world of Camelot and to Lancelot¹⁸ so that the lady's position is obviously strengthened. When a stanza referring to her is actually cut in part IV, it is the third stanza which insists on her innocence and passivity. On the other hand, the second half of the stanza omitted from part I covers the sequence of enigmatic questions about the lady's status in the world of Camelot ("But who hath seen her wave her hand?/Or at the casement seen her stand?/Or

as an affirmative *and* as a subversive mode of artistic production. Cf. Williams (1974: xiii): "The most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist, however, is probably the idea that human life [...] may ultimately be seen as unified and coherent" vs. Levine (1981: 3/4): "[R]ealism is itself intimately and authoritatively connected to the modernist position [...] [N]ineteenth-century writers were already self-conscious about their medium."

16 Cf. Armstrong (1989), who provides a table listing binary oppositions discernible in "The Lady of Shalott" and refers them to their wider 'modern' context ranging from Herder and Schiller on the one hand to existentialist philosophy, psychoanalysis and deconstruction on the other. On the Lacan connection see also Saville (1992).

17 The CD booklet actually states 1843, while the term "dead-pale" in line 157 was only introduced in 1855. However, all versions of the poem published after 1842 introduce only minor changes and variations.

18 In part I the third stanza is omitted so that the listener loses the realistic detail of "heavy barges trailed/by slow horses" (ll. 20-21). In part II the second half of second stanza and the first half of the third stanza are omitted so that there is no emancipation of the Camelot setting from its status as a reflection in the lady's mirror, and, following up on the omission of realistic detail in part I, no reference to love among the lower orders. Part III is presented without its second and third stanza, thus omitting a good deal of Lancelot's splendour as presented in elaborate comparisons to stars and meteors.

is she known in all the land,/The Lady of Shalott?" ll. 24-27), but these are transferred to the CD booklet where they appear against the background of a photograph of the interior of a ruined church submerged in water, thus gaining a prominent position without being included in the musical setting.

A similar strategy of focusing the poem on the lady can be observed in McKennitt's music which relies on a modernized 'folkish' instrumentation of vocals and keyboards plus balalaika, guitar, bass and fiddle, plus a cello which adds a 'classical' touch. The ballad-like composition is based on two contrasting musical motives ([A] and [B]), with [A] being aria-like, melodically wide-ranging, and lyrical, and [B] being less melodious, matter-of-factly narrative. These motives are introduced alternately as corresponding to the first and second part of each stanza in the course of part I, but from then on they are handled flexibly and acquire an additional meaning.¹⁹ All in all, the lyrical motive [A] turns out to be strongly associated with the lady and her isolated existence surrounded by nature, but *not* with the curse described in part II. Instead, the entrance of Lancelot and the lady's turning away from the loom are marked by [A], and the motive is taken up again in connection with the lady's death song, and, ultimately, in the final stanza, the only place where [A] is repeated to cover a stanza in its entirety. Thus the musical design suggests a reading of the poem that recapitulates the 'Romantic' 1832 version of the text rather than the realistic, but ambiguous 1842 text it had taken as a starting point. This Romantic impulse is in fact emphasized in the liner notes, written by McKennitt herself:

I have long considered the creative impulse to be a visit – a thing of grace, not commanded or owned so much as awaited, prepared for. A thing, also, of mystery. "Who is this, and what is here?" wonder Arthur's knights at the sight of the Lady of Shalott. This recording explores some of that mystery. (McKennitt 1991)

This is certainly not the self-reflexive impulse characteristic of Romantic art after realism, commonly called modernism and/or postmodernism. Taken in this wider sense, an exploration of Romanticism is an exploration of modern culture, covering the emergence of the schism between high art and popular culture and shedding new light on the romantically 'postmodern' attempts to close that gap.

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19 Part II: [B][B]+[B][B]+[B][B]; part III: [A][B]+[B][B]+[A][B]; part IV: [B][B]+ [B][B]+[A][B][B][B][B]+[A][A].

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Appendix: *The Two Versions of "The Lady of Shalott"*

Christopher Ricks, ed. (1987): *The Poems of Tennyson*, 2nd ed., 3 vols, Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman, I, 387-395 [1969].

(1832)

(1832+1842)

(1842)

P A R T I

On either side the river lie

Long fields of barley and of rye,

That clothe the wold and meet the sky;

And through the field the road runs by

To many-towered Camelot;

The yellowleaved waterlily

The greensheathed daffodilly,

Tremble in the water chilly,

Round about Shalott.

5

And up and down the people go

Gazing where the lilies blow

Round an island there below,

The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens shiver,

The sunbeam-showers break and quiver

In the stream that runneth 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 embowers

The Lady of Shalott.

10

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,

Little breezes dusk and shiver

Through the wave that runs for ever

15

Underneath the bearded barley,

The reaper, reaping late and early,

Hears her ever chanting cheerly,

Like an angel, singing clearly,

O'er the stream of Camelot.

Piling the sheaves in furrows airy,

Beneath the moon, the reaper weary

Listening, whispers "Tis the fairy

Lady of Shalott."

20

By the margin, willow-veiled,

Slide the heavy barges trailed

By slow horses; and unhealed

The shallop flitteth silken-sailed

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?"

25

The little isle is all inrailed

With a rose-fence, and overtrailed

With roses: by the marge unhealed

The shallop flitteth silken-sailed

Skimming down to Camelot:

A pearl-garland winds her head:

She leaneth on a velvet bed,

Full royally apparelled,

The Lady of Shalott.

30

Only reapers, reaping early

In among the bearded barley,

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,

Listening, whispers "'Tis the fairy

Lady of Shalott.'

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P A R T II

No time hath she to sport and play:
A charmed web she weaves alway.
A curse is on her, if she stay
Her weaving, either night or day,
To look down to Camelot.

She know not what the curse may be,
Therefore she weaveth steadily,
Therefore no other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

She lives with little joy or fear.
Over the water, running near,
The sheepbell tinkles in her ear.
Before her hangs a mirror clear,
Reflecting towered Camelot.

And, as the mazy web she whirls,
She sees the surly village churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

And moving through 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-haired page in crimson clad,
Goes by to towered Camelot;
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
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often through the silent nights
A funeral with plumes and lights
And music, came from Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed;
'I am half sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott.

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P A R T III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling through the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneeled
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glittered 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 blazen baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick, jewelled shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burned like one burning flame together,
As he rode down from Camelot.
As often through the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed,
On burnished hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flowed
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down from Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror,
'Tirra lirra,' by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the waterflower bloom,

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She saw the helmet and the plume,
 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.

P A R T 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 towered Camelot;

Outside the isle a shallow boat
 Beneath a willow lay afloat,
 Below the carven stern she wrote

The Lady of Shalott.

A cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight.
 All raimented in snowy white
 That loosely flew, (her zone in sight,
 Clasped with one blinding diamond bright),
 Her wide eyes fixed on Camelot.
 Though the squally eastwind keenly
 Blew, with folded arms serenely
 By the water stood the queenly
 Lady of Shalott.

With a steady, stony glance

Like some bold seer in a trance,
 Beholding all his own mischance –
 Mute, with a glassy countenance
 She looked down to Camelot.
 It was the closing of the day

She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
 The broad stream bore her far away,
 The Lady of Shalott.

As when to sailors while they roam
 By creeks and outfalls far from home,
 Rising and dropping with the foam,
 From dying swans wild warblings come,
 Blown shoreward; so to Camelot
 Still as the boathead wound along

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The willow hills and fields among,
 They heard her singing her last song,
 They heard her chanting her deathsong,
 The Lady of Shalott.

A longdrawn carol, mournful, holy,
 She chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
 Till her eyes were darkened wholly,
 And her smooth face sharpened slowly
 Turned to towered Camelot.

For ere she reached 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 pale, pale corpse she floated by,
 Deadcold between the houses high,
 Dead into towered Camelot.

Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
 To the planked wharfage came,
 Below the stern they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
 Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest.

There lay a parchment on her breast,
 That puzzled more than all the rest,
 The wellfed wits at Camelot.

*'The web was woven curiously
 The charm is broken utterly,
 Draw near and fear not – this is I,
 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 crossed 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.'

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The Conference of the German Association of University Teachers of English took place at the Pedagogical College of Erfurt from 27 to 30 September 1998 and was organized by Hans Ulrich Boas, Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann and Hans-Wolfgang Schaller.

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Gunter Lorenz, Dagmar Haumann, Günter Rohdenburg

Section II: *Humanism*

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