

Tennyson's "morte d'arthur" and "the lady of shalott" essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Tennyson's "Morte D'Arthur" and "The Lady of Shalott" **Essay Sample**

' Morte D'Arthur' and ' The Lady of Shalott' are tragic poems full of sadness and loss because they have a tragic story line, a tragic mood and atmosphere created by Tennyson's use of language and form. ' The Lady of Shalott' is tragic because she is cursed and dies without experiencing love. ' Morte D'Arthur' tells the story of the passing of a great king mourned by the faithful follower Sir Bedivere. Both poems are connected to the Arthurian legends, which contain ancient magic, mystery and romance.

' Morte D'Arthur' has a tragic storyline because it is the end of an era and many soldiers' lives have been lost:

" Man by man,

Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,"

The King is also in his final hours:

" The King is sick and knows not what he does"

Also, because Sir Bedivere is the last knight alive, he needs to do the final deed of throwing King Arthur's sword " Excalibur" into the lake. King Arthur commands him:

" Thou therefore Take my brand Excalibur,

Which was my pride

And fling him far into the middle mere:

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word"

But Sir Bedivere does not follow the order twice and King Arthur feels sadness and he feels betrayed:

" Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,

Unknightly, traitor - hearted! Woe is me!"

King Arthur, threatens Sir Bedivere:

" But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,

I will arise and slay thee with my hands"

King Arthur feels great sadness because his last trusted knight has betrayed and lied to him.

The process of the death of King Arthur is very tragic:

" Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath

My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die"

Both Sir Bedivere and the world will mourn his death.

The " Three Queens" also mourn his death. They represent his soul being taken away. Three being the magical number, and there is a spiritual reference in the story. Also the black imagery adds to the sadness:

“ And called him by his name, complaining loud,

And dropping bitter tears against his brow”

King Arthur, just before he dies says that he will go to “ Avilion.” This is the magical paradise or heaven. Arthur describes what it is like there:

“ Deep - meadowed, happy, fair with orchard - lawns

And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,

Where I will heal me of my grievous wound. “

Sir Bedivere is very upset about the loss of King Arthur. This portrays sadness:

“ Ah! My lord Arthur, whither shall I go?

Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?

For now I see the true times are dead.”

‘ The Lady of Shalott’ also has a tragic storyline because she is locked away from the world and she sees the world at second hand through a mirror: This also portrays sadness:

“ Four grey walls, and four grey towers,

Overlook a space of flowers,

And the silent isle embowers

The Lady of Shalott

She is very lonely and she often sees:

“ The knights come riding two and two”

However, this upsets her very much because,

“ She hath no loyal knight and true.”

We also see the beginnings of passion, the stirring of emotions stronger than the fear of the curse. At the end of part two after seeing the two lovers,

“ Lately wed”

She says,

“ I am half sick of shadows”

When she says “ half sick”, she means that she is fed up with looking at life through a mirror and she wants to see the world through her real eyes. She is overcome by the dazzling display that Sir Lancelot makes and leaves the artificial world. At the very end of the poem you feel a great deal of sympathy for the Lady. ‘ The Lady of Shalott’ is very tragic for the reader because we can see the sadness through the eyes of the Lady of Shalott.

In part three, a knight comes riding between the barley sheaves. This knight is the ‘ bold Sir Lancelot.’ Who is very attractive and:

“ Thick - jewelled shone the saddle leather,

The helmet and the helmet - feather

Burned like one burning flame together.”

He is a perfect man, both physically and morally as he is a red - cross knight, making him look even more attractive than he already is to the Lady of Shalott. For her, it is love at first sight. This is tragic because she may not leave the tower due to a curse. So, after seeing and hearing him, she disobeyed and left the tower. At the end of part three, there is a foregrounding of the word ' She.' This emphasises the way she is very decisive. Consequently:

“ 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.”

This alerts us to the following tragedy. She slowly floats down to Camelot and sings her last sad song. She sings:

“ Till her blood was frozen slowly,

And her eyes were darkened wholly”

This is a very sad, tragic image. Everyone of Camelot emerges to see her:

“ Knight and burgher, lord and dame,

And round the prow they read her name."

They read her name on the bow and cross themselves for fear. Lancelot looks and remarks:

" She has a lovely face;

God in mercy lend her grace,

The Lady of Shalott."

This is a very tragic and ironic ending because Lancelot was attracted to the lady. If the lady were without a curse, then they would have been together.

Tennyson's use of language in both poems adds to the effect of tragedy and loss. In ' Morte D'Arthur' Tennyson succeeds in creating a mysterious atmosphere through descriptions of the scenario, King Arthur and Sir Bedivere, for example,

" That stood on a dark strait of barren land.

On one side lay the ocean, and on one

Lay a great water, and the moon was full."

This is a sad setting because it is the ruins of the battle, " dark" and, " barren" explains how desolate it is. Similarly, ' The Lady of Shalott' has a tragic mood and atmosphere throughout the " Silent nights." Tennyson also uses Enjambment. This is where the lines flow into each other. This emphasises the Lady flowing down the stream tragically in the boat.

In conclusion, both poems have elements of tragedy, sadness and loss. 'Morte D'Arthur' is sad throughout the poem; whereas, in 'The Lady of Shalott,' the first three verses are calm, peaceful and bright. But the mood in part three onwards becomes violent and alarming as the peace is shattered, and there is a sense of sadness, tragedy and loss.