Women and Seclusion in Tennyson's Poetry

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Concerning Tennyson's early poems, Lionel Stevenson explained the poet's psychology by using the symbol of the 'high-born maiden', which Clyde de L. Ryals later complemented with his explanation of the 'fatal woman'. Seeing the poet's soul-image in these women, both critics followed his psychological evolution in the evolution of the symbol. Recently the feminist critic, Carol Christ, has argued that the isolated maiden in Tennyson's poems represents his 'feminine identification and idealization.' She bases her criticism on the social climate of the age, which let men seek 'passivity and asexuality' in women. Jungian criticism has concentrated on the poet's psychological development but has lacked the background of the age, while current feminist criticism is interested in the characteristics of the nineteenth century but lacks a sense of Tennyson's own evolution by regarding his poems synchronically.

Indeed no poet has described more women than Tennyson. His women represent his anima as Stevenson argues, and also the reality of women in the nineteenth century as Christ suggests. Just as real women change in the lapse of the time, Tennyson's representation of women changed as well. We can see his psychology, the social background of the age and furthermore his reaction to it in the representations. Thus following the climate of the nineteenth century and Tennyson's own evolution as a poet, we can recognize a motif in common among his poems: the theme of 'seclusion'. Just as he has been often called 'an escapist,' Tennyson has been preoccupied with his idiosyncratic combination of the themes of 'woman' and 'seclusion'. The motif which begins as a secluded woman in his early poetry (e.g. "Mariana," or "The Lady of Shalott") changes to that of a secluded man in his later poetry (e.g. *Maud* or "Merlin and Vivien"). Tennyson's concern, however, is consistently with the age and the relation between men and woman. Even though a man is absent in such poems as "Mariana" or "Mariana in the South," his very absence makes us conscious of him, and his untold relation to the secluded woman remains disputable.

How did the themes of 'woman' and 'seclusion' in Tennyson's main poems change during his career as a poet? How is this change related to his consciousness of the age? In the following paper I will show the significance of the themes of 'woman' and 'seclusion', focusing on the poet's psychology.
I

One of the greatest preoccupations of Victorian artists is womanhood. Alfred Austin, who succeeded Tennyson as Poet-Laureate criticized Victorian poets and novelists as imbued with femininity and named Tennyson first on the list. Considering that such introverted qualities as passivity and emotivity were popularly linked to the concept of femininity in those days, and are still, though resisted and modified, why did such feminine postures pervade the Victorian world? How were women treated in Victorian works? It is impossible to answer these questions without considering the social conditions of the nineteenth century.

It was the Industrial Revolution that made the nineteenth century quite different from the previous age for it changed the way of thinking about social and economical structures. The characteristic of the nineteenth century is described by the term, 'hard', because it is not only the age that 'hard' coal and iron symbolized the industry, but also the age in which economic and material progress made people 'hard'. The idea that material value came before spiritual value had already been criticized by Thomas Carlyle in 1829. But desire or yearning always comes from loss or want. As Victorian society became harder and more aggressive, it came to seek softness somewhere else as a counteraction. Aggression in society was a male characteristic since both society and men shared 'hardness' metaphorically. Just as 'hardness' which means 'coolness' or 'severity' has been called masculine, so 'softness' such as 'gentleness' or 'emotivity' has been linked to the feminine. A yearning for the spiritual value lacking in the age turned into an adoration of women's 'softness.' Gentle femininity was ironically brought into existence by the hard masculine reality of the age.

The Victorian people gradually lost their spiritual support through the loss of religion and changes in the social structure. Their dissatisfaction with the present was transformed into an admiration for the past. The Middle Age's influence on architecture, art, and literature had been growing since the eighteenth century. One of the reasons for the Gothic Revival in the nineteenth century was an admiration for the medieval spiritual ideal. It is misleading to think that the Victorian tendency to adore femininity denied all that was masculine. Rather masculinity was sought in the form of chivalry, with its charity and morality. For example the Arthurian romances were revived in the nineteenth century, for the people who were dissatisfied with the lack of social order and morality longed for chivalry. At the same time the idealized image of a 'sacred woman' was introduced to support the spiritual values. Many women were subjected to this idealized image; there were some who realized women's real situation of inequality, suppression and confinement, and finally came to rebel against them for emancipation.

However, the idealized female image was changing in the tide of the age. How
many women were satisfied to stay at home to keep its sanctuary? How many women were happily 'liberated' from the image? Most of the women of both types were rather victims of the hard society. Those victims, 'fallen women', represented a social aggressiveness which Nina Auerbach calls 'the abased figurehead of a fallen culture'.

Some women, after having perceived social aggressiveness and pressure, came to assume them as their own attributes and in turn used them to revenge themselves on men and society. Thackeray's Becky Sharp was such a case. These women, 'fatal women' with offensive power, faced up to men and society. As fatal women or fallen women increased in the real world, sacred women such as Tennyson's Isabella, Patmore's Angel, and Ruskin's Queen were needed by men and society as an ideal stereotype of women as a counterbalance. Thus the interest in women, real and idealized, was deeply connected to the interest in the social problems in the nineteenth century.

II

The contrast between an aggressive man and a sacred woman can be seen as a metaphor of the contrast between dehumanizing 'hard' society and sanctifying 'soft' spirituality. As a real woman changes, so the ideal image of woman could not remain a static object of admiration. The changing image of woman also changed the relation between a man and a woman and their metaphors. Then what aspect of society did Tennyson try to describe by changing the relation between a man and a woman, using the themes of 'woman' and 'seclusion'? Tennyson's early poems about secluded women describe the real existence of women and the soft spirituality of the women's image. Furthermore his own desire for retreat is projected on to the women's image. Tennyson never had a revolutionary mind like Byron or Shelley, nor did he criticize civilization like Carlyle or Matthew Arnold. Instead he was interested in the contrast between the 'hard' society and the 'soft' spirituality because he experienced this most of his life. Bulwer-Lytton suggested 'effeminacies' because Tennyson sometimes assimilates himself into those women in his poems, so he can share spiritual softness with them. Not that poets and women's desires are synonymous. While society progresses economically, it wants to confine women to ideal womanhood, even as real women become awakened and go beyond the confinement. On the other hand, when such a society demands that a poet should cease to sequester himself and participate in the society, the poet still seeks seclusion. Mariana and the lady of Shalott are the poet himself in the sense that they are in an interstice between seclusion and participation. A woman looking out from the window who is imprisoned and longs for an outside world is overlapped iconographically with a poet's looking out from the window who is requested to join the world.

Among these secluded women, Mariana rejects the notion of escape, waiting for
rescue. The lady of Shalott fails to participate though she tries to escape from the solitary tower. Finally in “The Palace of Art”, the Soul leaves her secluded life, although she seems to be compelled to as a punishment for her egoistical seclusion. Here Tennyson uses a moral sanction and actually puts an end to his fascination with Romantic seclusion. This does not mean, however, that he has thrown away his soft spirituality altogether, but that the metaphor which connects a woman’s seclusion to the poet’s has disappeared. In short, his genuine faith in a woman’s pure spirituality has disappeared. Tennyson’s images of woman and seclusion part company. After “The Palace of Art,” no woman is confined in his poetry, though the poet himself repeatedly looks back on his past solitary life, even after having joined the world.

The Princess is a narrative poem about Princess Ida’s secluded life, serialized by a contemporary narrative intricate as a chinese box. Princess Ida’s seclusion is different from other womens’ in Tennyson’s early poems because she does not lead a solitary life by herself but lives alone with women, intending to educate and liberate them in a women’s college where men are shut out and women mimic men’s postures. But Ida’s intention fails finally and she accepts men’s cooperation and coexistence.

The Prince’s father’s aggressive masculinity is criticized here and there. His foolish aggressiveness is clearly shown when he compares the relation between a man and a woman to that of a hunter and his game.

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:  
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,  
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;  
They love us for it, and we ride them down. (V. 11. 147–57)\(^{17}\)

The old king’s attitude is reduced to the ruling and the ruled class system, when he says “man is to command and woman to obey”. He asserts that man’s aggressiveness is the same as a ruler’s domination.

It is not only the old king’s offensive attitude that are caricatured. But so are the Amazonian women in the women’s college.

Then those eight mighty daughters of the plough  
Bent their broad faces toward us and addressed  
Their motion: twice I sought to plead my cause,  
But on my shoulder hung their heavy hands,  
The weight of destiny: so from her face  
They pushed us, down the steps, and through the court,
And with grim laughter thrust us out at gates.

(IV. 11. 529–534)

On the other hand the Prince's early femininity is directly and indirectly criticized both in his own description, "I was... blue-eyed, and fair in face./Of temper amorous," (l. 11. 1–2) and in Ida's reproach, "To nurse a blind ideal like a girl/Methink he seems no better than a girl' (III. 11. 201–2). Thus the Prince's femininity and the old king's or the Amazonian women's masculinity are both denied here. In the end when the Prince says, "the man be more of woman, she of man./He gain in sweetness and in moral height... She mental breadth," he presents an eclectic vision of man's gentleness and woman's wisdom, which finally Ida accepts.¹⁸ The stereotypical qualities considered the exclusive property of each sex are here recognized as shared and interchangeable.

Advancing science or industry and traces of the previous ages coexist in Victorian England in the frame. Sir Vivian's garden is open on a summer day once a year to his tenants and the factory workers in the Mechanics' Institute of which he is the patron. The festival at Vivian-place shows a transitional society and various eclectic aspects of the age.¹⁹ On the one hand small suburbs are developing into industrial cities during the Industrial Revolution and some institutes are built in those cities for the purpose of training workers. On the other hand there were still tenants who depended on wealthy farmers such as Walter Vivian. Those tenants and factory workers gathering at Vivian-place symbolize the peaceful coexistence of the old rural community and the new industrial city. As gardens are symbols of a class-system so the open Vivian-garden means the absence of class-discrimination even though temporary. In addition it also symbolizes a transitional stage where the working class encroaches on the upper-middle class.

At Vivian-place 'sport/went hand in hand with Science'. The leaders of the Mechanics' Institute enlighten the people by experiments of modern science. The interplay of science and sport is sustained in the garden; science does not deny all the old values in the name of 'hard facts' but exists together with sports with soft fancy.

Furthermore Sir Walter Vivian is, as it were, an interstitial man. He is a charitable man of a rural society on the brink of industrialization, as if a member of the gentry in the good old agricultural age.

No little lily-handed Baronet he,
A great broad-shouldered genial Englishman,
A lord of fat prize—oxen and sheep,
A raiser of huge melons and of pine,
A patron of some thirty charities,
A pamphleteer on guano and on grain,
The relationship between a wealthy gentleman and his tenants is based on trust beyond a class system. A peaceful life might be possible in a hard aggressive society only when a leader has the soft spirituality.

Both in the narrative of the prince and Ida and in the frame the binary opposition of a hard man vs. a soft woman, a masculine material civilization vs. a feminine spiritual civilization slightly overlap. 'A woman in seclusion' and 'a poet in seclusion' are both founded on an equality of man, industrial society, and hardness. Tennyson tries to deconstruct such an equality in The Princess. He, suspending his decision to participate or withdraw, presents an expectedly mediocre compromise in the end.

IV

Indeed Tennyson shows an ideal prospect in The Princess, but it cannot be realized easily. The aggressive aspect of society gradually encroaches on women's soft spirituality. Then women come to lose their femininity, that is, passivity or emotivity, and acquire an aggressive sensuality instead. Such a Victorian image of 'the fallen woman' is shown in Tennyson's later poems. He has already described some women under the influence of mammonism in the industrial society. Amy in "Locksley Hall" and Letty in "Edwin Morris" reject their unfortunate lovers and get married to wealthy men. Mammonism further pervades Maud: a Monodrama. However while the social hardness is emphasized on the one hand, there remains a dependence upon the woman's softness on the other. Unlike in The Princess, there is neither a compromise between a man and a woman nor an eclectic vision of society here. Not a woman, but a man retires from the world here. The woman who succumbed to mammonism affects him, though indirectly.

The opening of the poem begins with the anonymous hero's hatred for women.

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,
The red-ribbed ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,
And Echo there, whatever is asked her, answers 'Death'.

(I. I. 1. 1–4)

He believes that industrial society led his despairing father to commit suicide. He hates the heath because his father killed himself there after a failure in his speculation. His hatred for women and for society is overlapped in his hatred of the "blood-red heath" so he seeks seclusion from the society and women.
He attempts to seclude himself in the havens of his ancestral home in the woods, Maud's rose garden, and the sea.\(^2\) First he escapes into his house in the woods, away from both mammonian Maud's Hall and the town's clamour. But the peaceful nature which his ancestors once enjoyed has gone. 'Nature is one with rapine' (I. IV. IV. 123) and that the right of the strongest thrives in the woods never gives him comfort. Sanctifying Maud and hoping to consummate his love for her, the hero tries to escape into Maud's rose garden which is separated from both dehumanizing human society and cruel nature. He is obsessed with the idea that Maud's garden is the only place where he can both love her and seclude himself from the world. Further in his obsession he separates Maud from her father and brother who he thinks are money-mad, and relates her only to her mother.

Some peculiar mystic grace
Made her only the child of her mother  
(I. XII. III. 482–3)

He wants to find relief through Maud, a descendant from Eve who once lived in blissful Paradise. However does he forget that Eve was the very first woman to lead man to fall? Or rather does he realize that Maud in nature, as well as Eve, is endowed with the destructive power of seduction? In either case, Maud has ambivalent aspects of purity and impurity or of hope and anxiety for the hero. Gradually Maud plays the part of a fallen woman in accordance with his anxiety. Her phantom repeatedly appears and afflicts him in his insanity. Thus she becomes a destructive Eve for him. A man's hate and fear for a woman bring about a new image of a woman in \textit{Maud}.

The hero, who has recovered from insanity, finally chooses to fight in the Crimean War in the cause of patriotism. He justifies his action, imputing all of the social evils to the Russian Czar and considering the war as a holy one. Really he only wants to consummate his love for Maud who is already dead. Here again in his illusion, Maud seduces him out to sea. The sea is both the final seclusion and the field of battle.

She seemed to divide in a dream from a band of the blest,
And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars-
'And in that hope, dear soul, let trouble have rest,
Knowing I tarry for thee.'  
(III. VI. I. 10–13)

He allows himself to take part in war which is the most aggressive action, only because he believes Maud would accept it. He ambiguously compromises both the society and the woman, although he never conquers his hate for them.

Certainly here we can see Tennyson's fallen woman in a germinal stage. Being keenly conscious of a hard society which changes a pure woman into a fallen woman, he describes a man ruined by her in \textit{Maud}. A woman is, however, still linked to seclu-
sion here: it is Maud that has drawn the hero to seclusion.

V

The two aspects of a woman in *Maud* are turned into two types of women in *Idylls of the King*. At first he started to work on the two women in his *Idylls of the King*: "Enid and Nimue: The True and The False". For two years, Tennyson left unfinished a poem in which Vivien (former Nimue) seduced Merlin as he set about *Maud*. Since he worked on the two poems one after the other, the two women in them, Vivien and Maud, resemble each other in the regard that the destructive aspect of a woman is made by an aggressive society and that she has a deadly influence on a man. But Vivien is more aggressive than Maud: unlike Maud, Vivien is not linked to seclusion any more. She encroaches on Merlin’s seclusion and grabs his power instead.

*The Idylls of the King* begins with a description of a chaotic wilderness before Arthur founds a kingdom.

......ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarmed overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less......

“The Coming of Arthur”, 11. 5–12

Then Arthur establishes an ideal civilized society by driving the heathen and beasts away from the forest.

......Then he drave
The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled
The forest, letting in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight
And so returned.


Archetypically, however, civilization includes a fall. For civilization was first brought about after Adam and Eve fell and were exiled from Paradise. Ironically Arthur’s civilized society connotes the beginning of its fall with a beastly human nature although it appears to hold ideals.

Thus Arthur founds an ambivalent civilized kingdom. This is a male dominant
society, where achievement and action such as the overthrow of the heathen, accomplishment of quests and victory of tournaments are highly evaluated. The Round Table of Camelot symbolizes the equality of knights but in reality accomplishment and victory are crowned with glory. In short, a masculine ideology rules over the kingdom.

However the masculine ideology gradually threatens men themselves. The power of the kingdom which once belonged to men is now in the possession of women. Women, now ‘fallen women’ come to attack men. ‘Merlin and Vivien” is an apt illustration. Vivien was born in the war.

My father died in battle against the King,
My mother on his corpse in open field;
She bore me there, for born from death was I
Among the dead and sown upon the wind—
“Merlin and Vivien,” 11. 42–45

If civilization connotes some sacrifice, so does Vivien. She is a victim of Arthur’s foundation of an ideal society. The state or society always exerts its power upon the weakest, and women and children, because the power belongs to the masculine ideology, are oppressed. But ironically it is the victim that is the cause of the destruction of the kingdom in “Merlin and Vivien.”

First Vivien seeks her own revenge upon Arthur in vain and then upon Merlin. Merlin is a magician who helps Arthur to found the city, Camelot. Arthur makes an institution on the one hand, and Merlin gives a form to it by his magic on the other hand.

Merlin, who knew the range of all heir arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls......
11. 165–66

But it is Merlin who intuitively knows the fall of Camelot.

The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm.
11. 193–94

He anticipates the subversion of a kingdom where the powerless and the meanest will have a controlling power. Vivien whom Merlin calls the ‘worm’ is compared to a serpent repeatedly later in the poem. According to Merlin, men ‘scarcce can sink as low/ For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,/But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell’ (11. 811–13). Merlin thus has a glooming foreboding that the serpent
woman will cause the overthrow of the kingdom.

When Merlin retires from the city to the woods, he becomes passive, not initiating any action to cope with an omen of the overthrow of the kingdom, withdrawing from the society of the masculine ideology. But no matter how Merlin’s seclusion may be branded as a feminization, it must be distinguished from the women’s in Tennyson’s early poems. Both Mariana and the lady of Shalott longed for the outer world. The Soul in “The Palace of Art” finally went to the real world. The outside was a world of a linear time and action, different from their shadow world where time and space were imprisoned. Also Ida secluded herself in the women’s college because she intended to educate women to be as equally wise as men, yet yearning for the masculine world of action outside. The ‘outsideworld’ always attracted the women. On the other hand, the outside becomes a threat to Merlin as it does to the hero in Maud. But Merlin’s fear is not same as the hero’s. Arthur’s world, where the highest should have power and high purpose should be fulfilled is Merlin’s idealized world, while the hero fears its masculinity. Merlin’s fear is the overthrown world where ‘the meanest’ women come to have power. In other words his fear is of women.

Vivien follows Merlin after he retires to the wood. At last a woman’s power encroaches even on the woods, from which Arthur once expelled beasts and transformed into an idealized civilization. The wilderness and beasts are now about to recover their loss. The beast here is nothing but Vivien.

And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slid up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake;

Vivien, compared to a snake, beguiles Merlin with flattery, reproach, and entreaty into disclosing his magic. The inversion of the power relation between Merlin and Vivien means that human reason finally succumbs to human brutality. It anticipates that Arthur’s civilization will be soon destroyed by the beast in man.

If Arthur’s civilization includes a fall, Vivien’s seduction in the woods is the cause of the fall. Her seduction repeats the serpent’s and Eve’s in Eden. As civilization was originally caused by the fall of a woman by a serpent, so Arthur’s falls again by a serpent-woman, Vivien. Civilization’s cherished idealized vision cannot erase its gloomy human origin. On the other hand the fall of civilization repeats an eternal pattern.

Woman’s aggressiveness which began in Maud becomes more direct and severe toward man as the serpent-woman in “Merlin and Vivien”. The aggression of a snake is
shown by its shrewdness and cunning in various myths. In some measure Tennyson's serpent woman is influenced by Keat's Lamia and Coleridge's Christabel. Their serpent-women hide a fatal aggressiveness under their beauty. Although romantic serpent-women are mythic and exotic as Mario Praz suggests, Tennyson rather emphasizes their reality instead of their mystic aspects. Vivien who is a victim of civilization comes to assume a serpentine aggressiveness out of revenge. She is a serpent woman, as it were, whom a 'hard' society has created.

The inversion of the power relation between Merlin and Vivien leads him to ruin. As soon as he discloses his magic to her, he is confined in the hollow of an oak by her and loses 'life, use, name, fame.' Among the four, the 'use, name, and fame' are acting principles of men in Arthur's kingdom and are clearly graded. When Vivien says to Merlin, 'man dreams of Fame while woman wakes to love' (1. 458) he argues that 'fame' is prior to love.

...Fame with men,
Being but ampler means to serve mankind,
Should have small rest or pleasure in herself,
But work as vassal to the larger love,
That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.

11. 486–90

But 'use' precedes 'fame'. Merlin advised a young squire who aspired to be a knight, saying 'rather use than fame' (1. 478). However praised 'name' may be for the sake of 'fame,' 'fame' is only 'half-disfame' (1. 502) in nature. Even a magician Merlin has been slandered by being called the 'Devil's son' (1. 465, 495). 'Fame' is something that others evaluate, but 'use' is not. It is a loss of 'use' that Merlin fears most.

Lancelot also suffers from a loss of 'use' in the end of "Lancelot and Elaine." He tries to raise to fame but does not realize 'fame' can be 'half-disfame'. He does not know the vanity of 'name' until he feels a sting of conscience from his infidelity with Guinevere.

...what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?

"Lancelot and Elaine" 11. 1402–5

However 'use', which is unchangeable unlike 'name' or 'fame' and its inherent potency, is the first acting principle of man. Both Merlin and Lancelot lose 'use', although they deny 'name' and 'fame' and realize the value of 'use'. It must be noted that women al-
ways have something to do with men's loss of 'use' in *Idylls of the King*. As well as Vivien for Merlin, Elaine, especially when she is dead, greatly affects Lancelot's 'use.' After these two stories, *Idylls of the King* soon leads to the destruction of the kingdom.

Vivien brings Merlin under subjection by denying 'name' and 'fame.' Defaming and defacing the knights of the Round Table with her tongue, she acquires a magic out of wearied Merlin. Vivien's attack first by lies and slanders against a male-dominant society which began in "Balin and Balan", is now equipped with the power of magic. By magic Vivien erases Merlin's 'use' which cannot be erased by her words. Thus when she imprisons Merlin, she obtains a complete ruling power.

The society in "Merlin and Vivien" was once ruled by men. But once a woman comes to have an aggressive power, she counterattacks. Merlin's retirement ended in an imprisonment caused by such a woman's power. But Vivien who calls imprisoned Merlin 'a fool' is nothing but 'a fool'. Vivien takes "his glory" as her own, grabbing the laurels of a male-dominant society.

Then crying 'I have made his glory mine,"
And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echoed 'fool.'

11. 969–72

This is not an easy compromise at all. By this poem Tennyson seems to get to an experiential truth that the struggle between men and women continues as long as the society belongs to men, and that it will be eventually led to destruction.

The theme of 'women and seclusion' has been connected with the social structure of men and women. As the secluded women in Tennyson's early poems are similar to the poet himself in his emotive aspect, so the feminized men such as the prince, the hero in *Maud*, and Merlin embody his temperament in some measure. It seems that Tennyson is always fascinated with escape from aggressive society. Society is, however, still an object of the secluded women's longing even if it oppresses them. The hero as well joins the war out of patriotism although he unconsciously yearns for the seclusion of death. Though participation in society is accepted in these poems, why is an idealized society denied and destroyed in *Idylls of the King*?

The reason is that women change. Women are in the margin of society and in opposition to it. On the other hand men are in the center of society and united with it. Both femininity and masculinity are not essential but only attributive qualities. No matter how men become feminized, they never cease to be the center of society. As
well, no matter how women become ‘masculinized,’ they cannot be the center. The women in Tennyson’s poems are still in the margin until Maud appears, although they are transformed gradually. Even Maud in whom a sacred woman and a fallen woman coexist does not attack against society and men yet. The hero as well accepts the society without question.

Society is unacceptable for Merlin because woman has become antisocial and such an antagonistic fallen woman causes the society to be destroyed. Of course men, who are united with society, are led to be ruined as well. Society and an aggressive woman never coexist in the social structure that Tennyson describes. Here is a limitation of the nineteenth century, which the binary opposition of male society and women has brought about. Thereafter Tennyson comes to lose his interest in a real society and is attracted to the transcendent world instead. At the same time the theme of ‘women and seclusion’ disappears from his poetry.

It can be said that this very limitation arouses feminist criticism’s interest in Tennyson’s poetry because the limitation in the society is a mechanism which feminist criticism has tried to make clear.

Notes
7) Thomas Carlyle, “Sign of the Times.”


