CHAPTER II

POEMS WITH GREEK MYTHICAL HEROINES AS PROTAGONISTS

If one of the life-long concerns of Tennyson was art and the artist's relation to it, the other could be said to be the enigma of women, seemingly vulnerable and defenceless, yet with great potential for both good and evil. And just as he has written mythical poems reflecting his attitude towards art, he has composed a number of poems, with mythical women as subjects, throwing light on his concept of womanhood.

The salient feature of these poems is that they are not about maidens consumed with the passion of love, or about vain and wanton beauties who first ensnare handsome youths and then desert them to pine to death like Keats's dame without mercy. The subjects of these poems (with the exception of "Hero to Leander"), are sedate wives who are victims of infidelity, thoughtless over-indulgence, or some intrigue of their husbands. This choice seems to be related to the influence of his mother from early childhood. Hence, although his non-mythical poems on women have a fairly wide variety of characters, ranging from the passionate Fatima to the self-offacing and sincere Dora or the heartless Lady Clara, his portrayal of mythical women is confined mainly to faithful wives and loving mothers.
Tennyson's mythical poems with Greek women protagonists are the following: (1) Translation of Claudian's "Rape of Proserpine"; (2) "Hero to Leander"; (3) "The Sea-Fairies"; (4) "Oenone"; (5) "The Hesperides"; (6) "Semele"; (7) "Demeter and Persephone" and (8) "The Death of Oenone." But all of them do not fit in the criterion adopted in formulating this set. "The Rape of Proserpine" is an incomplete translation attempted between his eleventh and fourteenth years and also has the distinction of being his first extant poem. Since it is not an original composition its proper place is with other translations by the poet. "The Sea-Fairies" and "The Hesperides" are basically songs sung by a number of nymphs, in a hedonistic mood, in a significantly similar setting and form a more homogeneous group with "The Lotos-Eaters."

The poems chosen for this group are the ones which have only single Greek women in a sombre mood as their protagonists. The poems comprising this set are: (1) "Hero to Leander"; (2) "Oenone"; (3) "Semele"; (4) "Demeter and Persephone" and (5) "The Death of Oenone."

1. Christopher Ricks's chronological arrangement in The Poems of Tennyson has been followed in the ordering of the poems.

2. Ibid., p. 3.
These poems have been variously interpreted as projections of Tennyson's views on art, Christian faith, immortality of the soul, and have been treated as mood poems, or as the poet's attempt to distil into English language the classical pattern and style of Greek laments. It will, however, be wrong to assume that they are just vehicles for masked statements on art, faith, immortality, mood, or exercises in emulation of style. They are also reflective of Tennyson's own concept of womanhood. These poems have been grouped and regrouped by critics in various combinations, sometimes only amongst themselves and sometimes with non-mythical poems, with a seemingly common strand of theme running through them. But they have not yet been studied together as poems dealing with women in respect of love, marriage, and motherhood, as embodiments of the poet's own concept of womanhood. In the following paragraphs an attempt has been made to analyse these poems in the light of the above assertion.

Tennyson's female characters may be divided into two broad categories: the *femme fatale* and the ideal women. Both types figure in his Greek myth poems. A discussion of these types, as reflected in Tennyson's non-mythical poems, would help in putting the mythical ones in a proper perspective and will also bring out clearly the representative characteristics of these poems as poems on women.
Tennyson's concept of the "Fatal Woman" is not that of a metaphorical woman-vampire, somewhat akin to Keats's 'Belle Dame' without mercy or a Cleopatra—"one of the first Romantic incarnations of the type of the Fatal Woman." In "A Dream of Fair Women" Tennyson depicts only two fatal women in his pageant of beauties of lore—Helen and Cleopatra. But Tennyson's Helen is a sad woman who rues: "Where'er I came/ I brought calamity." (ll. 95-96). Cleopatra alone, in keeping with her Romantic image of the femme fatale, is uncontrite and unrepentant. With a naughty smile she says, "I have no men to govern in this wood:/ That makes my only woe." (ll. 135-136).

Some of the quaint vignettes of his early days—"airy fairy" Lilians, elusive Madelines, "frolic, falcon" Rosalinds of the 1830's were his femme fatale in embryo. Lilian is gay, frivolous and flirtatious, Madeline alternates between smile and frown and is thus happily engaged in tempting and repelling lovers, and keeps them guessing of her intent. Beauty and a heart of flint are gay Rosalind's weapons, while Lady Clara snares simple yeomen for pastime.


Praz writes: "Cleopatra combined the fabulous Oriental background with a taste for algolagnia, which... seemed to be in the very air of the Romantic period." (p. 231).
It is to be noted that out of approximately more than forty poems on women, just a few are on purely "fatal women." While dealing with the legendary women Tennyson shifts the focus from their fatal charm to certain essentially human and feminine aspects of their characters, for instance, he dwells on the contriteness and repentance of Helen, Rosamond and Guinevere. Lady Clara, Cleopatra and Vivien alone stand out as examples of the fatal woman type but Tennyson's treatment of them is very sketchy and, in a sense, even casual. The fatal women in his mythical poems are Aphrodite, with her guerdon of Helen in "Oenone," Eos in "Tithonus" and Pallad Athena in "Tirnavian."

In his long poetical career Tennyson came across a large number of women, ranging from the humblest to the Queen of England herself, but the woman he seems to have loved, admired, and adored above all, was possibly his own mother. He makes her the subject of his poem "Isabel" wherein he describes this "remarkable saintly woman," who, as Hallam Tennyson wrote, "devoted herself entirely to her children." Tennyson himself feels:

...the world hath not another
(Though all her fairest forms are types of thee,
And thou of God in thy great charity)
Of such a finished chastened purity.

("Isabel," ll. 38-41)

Sinfield observes:

The wifely ideal seems to have a more specific purchase [sic] for Tennyson, deriving from his admiration for the way his mother coped with the depression and alcoholism of his father. 'Isabel' evokes 'The stately flower of female fortitude, / Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead' but is rendered distinctive by the special demands made upon her by her 'wayward' husband....

Tennyson describes her as:

A clear stream flowing with a muddy one,
Till in its onward current it absorbs
With swifter movement and in purer light
The vexèd eddies of its wayward brother:
A leaning and upbearing parasite,
Clothing the stem, which else had fallen quite....

("Isabel," ll. 30-35).

Through a nature image the poet projects the moral courage of his mother and her love for his father, which gave her strength to face the odds of life and keep the home intact for her husband and children.

Tennyson's good women are modelled more or less on his mother and reflect one or more of her qualities of patience, nobility, generosity, loyalty, and exemplify true

love, wifehood and motherhood. A few women are drawn as
incarnations of an iron will and indomitable courage in
the performance of their duties. Examples of the former
are Mariana, Oenone, Adeline, Amy, the Miller's daughter,
Lady Clare, Dora, etc. "Godiva" and "Boadicea" are about
bold, courageous and strong-willed good women.

"The Princess" is the poet's statement on women's
role in society. Its heroine, Princess Ida, harks back to
a poem of the eighteen thirties, "Kate," whose protagonist
Kate, too, is a fierce feminist who calls men "gilded flies"
and would not hear of "lover's sighs." It is she who seems
to have logically evolved into the rebellious Princess Ida
by 1847, when "The Princess" was first published. The image
of his mother, projected in "Isabel," continues to be his
ideal of womanhood throughout these years as is evident from
the manner Ida is finally "won to the role of wife and
mother." That this ideal persists till the end of his
days is obvious from his last mythical poem which is also
his last poem on women protagonists— "The Death of Oenone."
While "The Princess" resolves itself into a statement of
the wholesomeness of marriage, home, and family for a

6. "Isabel" was published in Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, in
1830.

7. Alan Sinfield, op.cit., p. 139.
healthy society, "The Death of Oenone" brings round the
irate Oenone of 1832 to uphold the institution of marriage.

The protagonists of Tennyson's mythical poems on
women are a reflection of his ideal of womanhood. The
tone of these poems is sombre. Some of them are literary
laments, for the poet tries to incorporate in them features
of the Greek 'lament'. Others are comparatively free and
original in style and form, but a sorrowful mood pervades
all of them. This community of spirit—the poet's
predilection for suffering women—may have had its genesis
in his childhood memories of his unhappy mother. It has
been stated earlier that the subjects of these poems are
sedate wives who are victims of infidelity or caprice of
their husbands with the exception of the first poem of
this group, "Hero to Leander."

"Hero to Leander" is a romantic poem about the true
and undying love of Hero for Leander. Hero is not a
married woman like other protagonists of this set. The
tragedy occurs during the nocturnal courtship of the
lovers. Leander is bent upon crossing a stormy sea to
return home from their rendezvous. He turns a deaf ear
to Hero's pleading to stay back. The poem is fragmentary
in nature. Based on the pattern of the "aubade," i.e., a

8. Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in
song of farewell, it embodies the reluctant farewell of Hero, who has a premonition of Leander's drowning in his attempt to cross the stormy sea. She swears that if he comes to harm, she, too, would die. The poem ends here and does not indicate whether Leander is ultimately prevailed upon to stay or not. The poem is about youthful love and the lament is due to Hero's anxiety out of love and not because of Leander's infidelity.

Oenone, on the other hand, is a woman cheated in love. She symbolizes the deserted yet faithful wife. It is noteworthy that the poet wrote two poems on Oenone—one in the early phase and the other in the last phase of his poetical career. What could be the reason that impelled him to take up the same theme again? Was there anything inherent in the first poem that became the source of inspiration for the second? In this context, Stange's observation on Tennyson's career may be noted: "the pattern, in its broad outlines, is of a youthful burst of subjective lyricism followed by a half-century of suppression, propriety, and worldly success" and "... the tensions --

9. "T.'s note observes that Oenone was 'married to Paris, and afterwards deserted by him for Helen'." (The Poems of Tennyson, p. 334).

and richness— which mark Tennyson's early work can be found at the end as well as at the beginning of the collected poems."¹¹

The remarks are with regard to "Demeter and Persephone," a poem of the last phase of Tennyson's career, and hence equally applicable to "The Death of Oenone," his last mythical poem. Since "Oenone" belongs to the early phase of his poetical career, these remarks are relevant to it, too. Their implication clearly is that the poems of the early and later phases of his career are equally motivated by the poet's inner compulsions. The two Oenones belong to these two phases. They are linked by a common subject which reflects his concept of womanhood— as a young man in "Oenone," and as a seasoned, aged sire in "The Death of Oenone." The development and maturing of his views on women during the intervening half-century are reflected in his non-mythical poems of this period, especially "The Princess."

The sources of "Oenone," in both substance and form, range from Ovid, Theocritus, Virgil, Homer, Aeschylus, Lucretius, Catullus and Horace to Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. It has rightly been called "... a distillation, not

of life, but of literature."\textsuperscript{12}

The incidents of this poem are apparently based on Ovid's \textit{Heroides} while the story is derived from the legends of the Trojan War. While earlier poets wrote copiously on the Trojan and Greek heroes and the plight of their womenfolk, Oenone was rather neglected till Ovid took up her theme in the fifth epistle of his \textit{Heroides}.\textsuperscript{13} It was from this twilight region of the epical past that Tennyson picked up the faithful nymph wife of Paris to delineate her woe.

As always, his treatment of this myth also is original and fragmentary in nature. Bush refers to it as "a miniature epic in a luxuriant natural background."\textsuperscript{14} The

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\item \textsuperscript{13} Appendix II, B, pp.226-233.
\item \textsuperscript{14} "For the general mode of treatment, the placing of a miniature epic in a luxuriant natural background, Tennyson was indebted to the Alexandrian idyll and \textit{epyllion}, especially to his favourite Theocritus."

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An 'epyllion' is defined as "a brief or miniature epic, such as the poem of Theocritus (XXIV) on the infant Heracles, and that of Catullus on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis" (The \textit{Oxford Companion to Classical Literature}, ed., Sir Paul Harvey, 1937; rpt., London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969, p. 168).
nomenclature of "a miniature epic" or "epyllion" is, however, hardly justified, as the narrative element is only in the intermittent flashbacks which give the genesis of Oenone's plight, after which there is no development in the narrative. The poem begins with a distraught Oenone, raving and roaming over the hills and dales of her "Mother Ida," and ends with her still being there, though threatening to go to Troy to meet Cassandra. Tennyson's depiction centres around a single mood and location, with the poem ending just where the narrative begins to pick up and take the story forward. The element of atonement could be said to disqualify it even as a "miniature epic." But this rather abrupt end emphasises its incomplete, fragmentary nature. It could have been called a small epic if its sequel, "The Death of Oenone," were included as part of the poem. Without this, the poem remains but a potential narrative, cut short when the story is almost poised to move forward.

The poem was composed sometime during 1830-31. It was about this time that the poet was haunted by the image of a distraught, pining woman, whose lover had deserted her. It was during this period that the two 'Marianas', too, were composed. "Mariana" was published in 1830 and "Mariana in the South" and "Oenone" during 1832-33. All of them are studies of women abandoned by their fiancés or husbands.
About the epigraph to "Mariana" Ricks writes that it is from "Measure for Measure" III, i, 212, ff: "She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed.... Left her in her tears, and died not one of them with his comfort.... What a merit wore it in death to take this poor maid from the world! .... There, at the moated grange, resides this dejected Mariana." 15

The idea for "Mariana in the South" came to Tennyson during the same tour in which he conceived the idea of "Oenone"-- his tour of the Pyrenees with Arthur Hallam, when the two were "journeying together... through the South of France... came upon a range of country just corresponding to his preconceived thought of a barrenness." 16

The poet's composition of three poems in a row, with the same prevalent mood and theme, revealing the agony of deserted women, sometime with the help of scenic parallel of desolation in Nature, sometime with a rich setting made

15. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 187.

This sense of dejection and loneliness commented on by Arthur Hallam, is noticed by Ricks too but on a broader canvas, though during the same period. He writes: "The seven poems which matter most in Poems (1832) are all concerned in some way with loneliness, guilt, or injustice: 'The Lady of Shalott,' 'Mariana in the South,' 'Oenone,' 'The Palace of Art,' 'The Lotus Eaters,' 'A Dream of Fair Women,' and 'To J.S.'" (Ricks, Tennyson, p. 78)
desolate because of the distraught heart, points to something more than a mere exercise of the poet's art. Some personal sorrow or experience, which was growing at his heart, finds expression in these poems. It may be recalled that his own mother was similarly distraught during this period. The estrangement this lady suffered was not because of the infidelity of her husband but because of the gradual distancing between the husband and the wife, brought about by his mounting ill-temper and fits of violence. The years from 1827 till his death in 1831, seem to be particularly trying. For her it was not a physical desertion but an emotional one. Her faithful heart and loving nature suffered the gradual erosion of companionship and togetherness. That could be a reason for three poems on deserted women being composed during this period. The image of a distraught, pining woman haunted Tennyson in different backgrounds. We have the first Mariana "in the moated grange," and the second Mariana, in a Southern barrenness.\(^1\)

\(^{17}\) "The drink habit continued to increase its hold on the unfortunate Doctor and now began to induce paroxysms of violence which were to have disastrous effect on the family life. Mrs. Tennyson suffered acutely and Alfred suffered with her ...."

(\textit{Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 1949; Alfred Tennyson, 1950, p. 48.})

\(^{18}\) "Isabel," the two Marianas, and "Oenone" were composed in 1830 initially. "Isabel" and "Mariana" were published in 1830, and "Mariana in the South" and "Oenone" were begun in 1830. It is noteworthy that Isabella and Mariana are two faithful, loving women in \textit{Measure for
It may then be surmised that the mountain ranges, cascading waterfalls, and the woods of the Pyrenees, called to his mind the "woody Ida" with the image of a hapless Oenone on its hills.

The poem has been criticized as lacking in sincerity and as being "only a painted grief upon a painted mountain." This is rather a harsh judgement. The stanza that seems to have evoked it possibly is:

Her cheek had lost the rose, and round her neck,
Floated her hair or seemed to float in rest.
She, leaning on a fragment twined with vine,
Sang to the stillness, till the mountain-shade
Sloped downward to her seat from the upper cliff.

(ll. 17-21).

Turner says that this image "faintly suggested the association of Oenone with Dido and Cassandra..." But Cassandra's

Measure. The poem about the poet's mother Elizabeth is entitled "Isabel" and no brings to mind the Isabella of the play. It may be surmised that there is a conscious relationship between these poems, that they are related to each other for they are inspired by, and are reflections of, aspects of his mother Elizabeth's image. Paden points this out, saying: "From the same play [Measure for Measure] Tennyson took the notion of 'Mariana' and (to a slight extent) of 'Isabel': the imaginative context of the two poems has more interest than has been perceived."

(Tennyson in Egypt, pp. 157-158).


hair floated when she was in a frenzy, and saw visions of Ilion burning. Oenone's grief made her lose her sap. While her heart was wild with grief her body seemed to be inert with debilitating sorrow. Her unkempt hair that had blown round her neck "seemed to float in rest." The image contains the paradox of "float" and "rest," which, in a significant manner, symbolically projects the wild state of her heart and the listless state of her body.

The nymph Oenone lives in the lap of Nature amidst mountain streams, under the shadow of snowy Gargorus. She communicates with Mt. Ida, cohorts with its birds and beasts, and its cave is her hideout. Later she seems to make it her home because it is associated with happy and sad memories of the past. It is worth noting that in "The Death of Oenone," too, she is shown in the same background, brooding over her past till "Her Past became her Present." (ll. 14). The ivies, once gay with pendent bells and star like flowers are now "dead cords," the earth is "flowerless." She relives the judgement when Aphrodite

... with a subtle smile in her mild eyes,
The herald of her triumph, drawing nigh
Half-whispered in his ear, "I promise thee
The fairest and most loving wife in Greece,"
She spoke and laughed: I shut my eyes for fear:

The poet portrays two different types of women in juxtaposition—Aphrodite, beautiful, flirtatious and tantalizing, with the tempting reward of Helen; and Oenone, a simple mountain nymph, with love and loyalty in her heart for her husband Paris. Tennyson's focus in this juxtaposition, however, is mainly on the second type, represented here as the aggrieved wife, Oenone. The first type is used as a foil.

Oenone is patterned on the poet's ideal of womanhood. With deep sensibility and infallible insight he describes her reaction to the situation where Paris seems to weaken in the face of Aphrodite's wiles to win the prize of the "golden apple." Oenone is pricked at the award being given in exchange for the "fairest and most loving wife in Greece." The contest between the goddesses breaks the confines of their rivalling beauty and becomes a choice between "... ample rule/ Unquestioned, overflowing revenue..." (ll. 109-110); "...a life of shocks,/ Dangers, and deeds..." (ll. 160-161); or "The fairest and the most loving wife in Greece...." (ll. 183). Paris' acceptance of Aphrodite's offer is an affront to Oenone, who, but a short while ago, had been adjudged worthy of the gift by him, saying that the ingraven words on the rind, "'For the most fair', would seem to award
it thine' 21 (ll. 71). Being dismissed so easily from his thoughts for another is an insult to her beauty and a slight to her love. She is full of indignation as she sarcastically questions, "Most loving is she?" (line 197) and stakes her claim to a stronger passion for her husband, saying:

Ah me, my mountain shepherd, that my arms
Were wound about thee, and my hot lips press
Close, close to thine in that quick-falling dew
Of fruitful kisses, thick as Autumn rains
Flash in the pools of whirling Simois.

(ll. 198-202).

The fact that Paris did not appreciate her deep love and fidelity cuts her to the quick. The judgement of Paris, instead of being a judgement of the comparative beauty of the three goddesses becomes a trial of the ethical norms of Paris himself. Constancy is the touchstone of marriage. Paris has failed the test. Oenone is torn between anger, jealousy and self-pity. Her hatred for Eris, for being the root-cause of her misery, is so great that she does not refer to

21. Tennyson makes his Oenone beautiful in keeping with the classical concept of beauty. Theocritus' beautiful girl, watching from the cave has "meeting eye brows." Tennyson's Paris calls Oenone "Beautiful browed Oenone."
her by her name. She, scornfully calls her the "Abominable" one "that uninvited came / into the fair Pelian banquet-hall...." (ll. 220-221).

While Oenone treats wedlock as a sacred bond and continues to be devoted to Paris as her husband on the one hand, she is filled with a feeling of revulsion towards him for desecrating this sacred tie on the other. Tennyson highlights Oenone's love-hate response to the situation with the help of a slight deviation from the myth as given in the two well known sources, i.e., Ovid's fifth epistle in The Heroides and Quintua Calabar's The Fall of Troy. Neither of the two mentions Oenone's child, though Ovid makes her say that she is "worthy of being" and has a "desire to be, the matron of a puissant lord...." 22 Tennyson, it may be noted, makes her desire the contrary when he makes her say:


Robert Graves, however, mentions Oenone's son by Paris:

"Paris had an elder son by Oenone, named Corythus, whom, in jealousy of Helen, she sent to guide the avenging Greeks to Troy."


Graves cites "Conon; Narratione, 22; Tzetzes; On Lycophron 57 ff" as his sources (p. 276). We have no evidence to establish that Tennyson had read Conon or Tzetzes and hence we cannot say with certainty that he borrowed the idea of Oenone's son from either of them and then transformed it into an imaginary motherhood of the nymph. Nevertheless, it may be noted that the manner in which he has introduced the notion makes it different from that of his established as well as the probable sources averted to above.
... I dimly see
My far-off doubtful purpose, as a mother
Conjectures of the features of her child
Ere it is born: her child! - a shudder comes
Across me: never child be born of me,
Unblest, to vex me with his father’s eyes!

(ll. 246-251).

Besides offering a deep insight into the psychology of an aggrieved wife, it throws light on an important aspect of Tennyson’s concept of womanhood and marriage. Critics have overlooked Oenone’s apparent rejection of motherhood. But it not merely reflects Tennyson’s sensitive portrayal of a slighted and jealous woman’s psyche, but also brings into bold relief her sense of outrage at the defilement of marriage. The special significance of mother and child relationship for Tennyson is evident from “Rizpah” and “The Princess.” Motherhood is more potent for Rizpah than even religion, for Rizpah does not care for salvation when it comes to choosing between it and the bones of her dead son:

“And if he be lost— but to save my soul that is all you desire:/ Do you think that I care for my soul if my boy be gone to the fire?” (ll. 77-78).

23. The lines, “never child be born of me, / Unblest, to vex me, with his father’s eyes!” (ll. 250-251), are an echo of the lines from a surviving scene of a lost play of his boyhood (printed in A Memoir, I, pp. 23-25): “You would look down and knit your baby brows / Into your father’s frown, ....” (p. 25).
Tennyson himself says: "The child is the link through the parts [of 'The Princess'], as shown in the Songs (inserted 1850), which are the best interpreters of the poem...." Oenone's imagined motherhood and her reaction to it is the result of the 'love' between husband and wife becoming suspect. The child (a symbol of love and understanding between husband and wife in Tennyson), from such a union becomes an anathema. Ovid's Oenone writes that she too could have played false like Paris, for not only "the swift Satyrs" sought her, she was courted by Apollo himself:

Me, the builder of Troy, well known for keeping faith, loved, and let my hands into the secret of his gifts. Whatever herb potent for aid, whatever root that is used for healing grows in all the world, is mine. 25

It is interesting to note that Tennyson's "Oenone" of 1832-33 is remotely suggestive of Apollo's courtship when she addresses Paris as Apollo: "Welcome Apollo, welcome home Apollo, / Apollo, my Apollo, loved Apollo." In his revised standard version of the poem, however, she drops


Ricks observes: "'Killham studies in detail the relation between the poem and the feminism of the age. 'Whether the marriage-relationship could survive the fulfilment of women's aspirations is the real point at issue' (p.65). Hence T.'s stress on the child, both in the narrative (Aglaia) and in the intercalated songs'."

(Ibid., p. 742).

even this innocuous reference to Apollo. Tennyson replaces the lines with: "And his cheek brightened as the foam-bow brightens / When the wind blows the foam, and all my heart / Went forth to embrace him coming ere he came." (ll. 60-62). In the later poem, "The Death of Oenone," though reference is made to the fact of Oenone's medicinal powers acquired from Apollo (for Paris, wounded with a poisoned arrow, comes to her as a suppliant whom she alone can heal), the god is not alluded to even indirectly. The deletion of the lines from the 1832-33 version of "Oenone" and avoidance of any direct or indirect reference to him makes it obvious that Tennyson intended to emphasise Oenone's unswerving fidelity as a wife. As an aggrieved wife she can think of only one option, i.e., death. This also is the refrain of her lament. The complaints in her wail are but an unburdening of her heart before she silences herself for ever. With fine perception Tennyson makes her change her tone and mood. The thought of dying helplessly, with Paris glorying in his new found love, becomes unendurable. Burning rage mounts within her as


27. Oenone's taking just one option, that of suicide, is in a way an upholding of the institution of marriage. "The Death of Oenone" gives the poet's well considered statement on this issue.
she imagines her husband and his paramour's shrill laughter breaking in on her "carless road of death." She will not die alone, she declares. "Wild Cassandra" has visions of a fire dancing before her. Oenone's whole being burns with rage so that "All earth and air seem only burning fire." (line 264). The poem ends on her seething anger and revolt.

Tennyson taken up the subject of Oenone once again, after a lapse of more than fifty years, in "The Death of Oenone." Piske calls it a sequel to "Oenone." The poet might have felt that he had left Oenone in the lurch in the first poem and the 'sequel' was meant to resolve the marital impasse between her and her errant husband.

The source of "The Death of Oenone" is "The Fall of Troy" by Quintus Calabar. Tennyson, in "To the Master of Belliol," a poem introducing "The Death of Oenone," wrote that its theme was "Somewhat lazily handled of old."

Mustard refutes Tennyson's claim that this poem is one of "those classical subjects ... which had been before but imperfectly treated, or of which the stories were slight (ii. 13) ...."

28. "The Death of Oenone" was written between August 1889 and July 1890. It was published in 1892 as a sequel to "Oenone." (See The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1427).

A comparison between the last part of Book X of
The Fall of Troy (line 240 onwards) and Tennyson's
"Death of Oenone" shows that the Greek poet has been
closely followed. The wounded Paris approaching Oenone
for cure, her indignant refusal, his warning her of the
anger of gods at turning away a suppliant, his death on
the hillside while returning, the discovery and
cremation of his dead body by the shepherds who were his
one time playmates, Oenone's realization that the blaze
she saw was of Paris' funeral pyre, and her self-immolation
by leaping into the flames are all in Quintus Calabar in
this very manner, with minor variations that impart to
the English poem an undeniable artistic refinement. Quintus'
Oenone is shown sitting in her father's house, surrounded
by her maids, while Tennyson's keeps brooding in the same
cave from where she "Used to gaze/ Down at the Troad"
(ll. 2-3), or watched from behind this very screen, Paris
as a judge of the goddesses:

... but the goodly view
Was now one blank, and all the serpent vines
Which on the touch of heavenly feet had risen,
And gliding through the branches overbowed
... were withered long ago,
And through the sunless winter morning-mist
In silence wept upon the flowerless earth.

(ll. 3-9)

30. Appendix II, Bi, pp. 233-244.
31. Ibid.
Tennyson's Oenone in "Oenone" keeps recalling her happy time on Mt. Ida which is like a mother to her. She confides her woes to its hills and dales as she roams over them.

Although "The Death of Oenone" is based on Quintus Calabar's depiction of Oenone, Tennyson given it some original touches. He does not shift her from Mt. Ida. His adherence to the same location and highlighting the change that has come over the place with the passage of time, the ravage of the woods for ships and weapons, the dried cords that were once blooming vines, strengthen the continuity of the theme of the "Oenone" of his youth. The flora and fauna are the same but altered in keeping with the mood and condition of the second Oenone. This link between the two poems gives the impression that the poem of his old age is not a new one on the same subject but picking up of the threads of the earlier tale with Oenone's (now simmering) anger, which culminates in her refusal to heal him. Thus, Tennyson's not drawing on Quintus Calabar for Oenone's habitation has a dual purpose; thematic, for this change makes it a realistic continuation of the first poem about Oenone, the aggrieved wife; and artistic, because this very realism imparts to it an artistic refinement. That is why he discovers her, logically, in the same cave, lost in her happy past till
Her Past became her Present, and she saw him, climbing toward her with the golden fruit; him, happy to be chosen Judge of Gods...

(ll. 14-16).

In the Greek version, when Paris comes as a suppliant to be healed, Oenone spurning him in full of scorn and

Thou comest unto me! -- thou, who didst leave
Erewhile a wailing wife in a desolate home! --
Didst leave her for thy Tyndarid darling! Go,
Lie laughing in her arms for bliss! She is better
Than thy true wife -- is, rumour saith, immortal!
Make haste to kneel to her -- but not to me!

Tennyson's Oenone is cryptic and restrained. Paris pleads:

'Help, heal me, I am poisoned to the heart'
'And I to mine' she said, 'Adulterer,
Go back to thine adulteress and die!'

(ll. 46-48)

In the Greek poem shepherds discover the dead Paris and nymphs weep round the funeral pyre as they recall their childhood with him. In Tennyson's version the shepherd who had reared him finds him on the hill side. In the Greek story Oenone "...feared/No shaggy beast that met her in the dark/ Who erst had feared them sorely" as she rushed down the hill. Tennyson's Oenone paces down slowly in

32. Appendix II, Bi, p.236.
33. Ibid., p.242.
darkness, though equally unafraid, for she is unmindful of
the hissing snake, the springing panther and the shrieking bird
of prey. Quintus Calabar's Oenone, without uttering a word,
muffles up her face with her mantle and springs quickly into
the fire. Tennyson's Oenone does the same, but it is sig-
nificant that she utters the word "Husband" as she leaps
on to the flaming pyre and 'mixes' "herself with him and"
'passes' "in fire." (ll. 106). The earlier version projects
young Tennyson's sense of revolt against an unjust and
errant husband, while the later his mature belief in
the sanctity of matrimonial relationship. In "The Death
of Oenone" the aged poet finally re-establishes the
sacred bond of marriage by a "supreme act of forgiveness," 34
though in death. It is the woman who upholds the sanctity of
marriage and thereby keeps the warp and woof of society intact.
It may be said that it is perhaps to establish this, and not
because Quintus Calabar has "somewhat lazily handled" the
theme (as Tennyson wrote to Jowett), 35 that he took up the
theme of Oenone again after a lapse of almost fifty years.
Bush seems to err in judgement when he labels it as "the
only one of the long series of classical poems which is
not modernised and animated by personal emotion." 36

34. Ricks, Tennyson, p. 291.
35. And read a Grecian tale re-told,
Which cast in later Grecian mould,
Quintus Calaber
Somewhat lazily handled of old;
("To the Master of Balliol," ll. 5-8)
The Poems of Tennyson, p. 1426.
36. Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in
English Poetry, p. 224.
The upholding of marriage for the well-being of a healthy society, the role of women in its upkeep and preservation with their loyalty, love, and self-sacrifice, are undercurrents of the narrative that are as modern as they are ancient. For Tennyson they are emotively personal as well, for they are linked to memories of the tenacity with which his mother tried to hold the home together and give as much security as she could to the children. They are linked to his own domestic life, made happy by the love and cooperation of his wife Emily. The one classical poem that could fit Bush's remark seems to be "Hero to Leander" rather than "The Death of Oenone," for the former is purely an exercise of his poetic art while the latter embodies a significant message, drawn from his own experience, relevant to society.

While Paris' infidelity is responsible for the pain and suffering of Oenone, Semele loses her life due to the over-indulgence of her divine paramour Zeus. "Semele" is an incomplete poem of about 28 lines, a literal fragment, composed during 1833-35, when Tennyson was under the

37. Bush writes: "The upholders of a marital bond between Paris and Oenone were Ovid and Quintus Smyrnaeus; .... Marriage, it would appear, was not a purely Victorian or Tennysonian invention." *(Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry, pp. 222-223).*

38. Ricks writes that "Semele" was printed by Hallam Tennyson in 1913 (p. XXIV) as a fragment written c.1835. *(See The Poems of Tennyson, p.574).*
shadow of Hallam's death. The poem is based on one of the amorous escapades of Zeus. According to the myth Semele was loved by Zeus, and at the instigation of the jealous Hera, entreated him to visit her in all the splendour of a god. This he did and she was consumed by his lightning glory. But Zeus rescued her unborn child from the ashes and placed it in his thigh, from which in due time it was born.\(^{39}\) This poem may be regarded as an allegorical depiction of the relationship between the poet's mother and father, revealing particularly the overpowering dominance of his father. His mother was a woman of exceptional simplicity and charm. Tennyson considered her to be "one of the most angelick natures of God's earth, always doing good as it were by a sort of intuition."\(^{40}\) Often the general atmosphere at Somersby became very tense, for at times Dr. Tennyson was very violent and abusive. His treatment of his wife and children gradually became so unbearable that once, in 1829, she "felt it impossible to continue under the same roof as her husband."\(^{41}\) The domestic life of this period could be said to form the background of

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39. The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed., Sir Paul Harvey, p. 147, under the heading "Dionysus."


41. Ibid., p. 61.
this poet. The poem, in a way, depicts Tennyson's affection for both his parents. Although the poem was written when the poet is generally supposed to have been occupied with his friend Hallam's death, it is not to be forgotten that his father too had died just two and a half years before Hallam. Whatever may have been the shortcomings of his father, he (Tennyson) loved him well and often brooded upon his loss, as is evident from the veiled reference to him in some of the poems written before Hallam's death. This pain, however, got absorbed in the later sorrow at his friend's death, for it almost followed on the heels of the loss of his father. 42 Tennyson was labouring under,

42. In a poem published in 1832-33 entitled "To J.S.," the poet is commiserating with him (James Spedding) on the death of his brother. The following stanzas figure in the poem:

This is the curse of time. Alas!
In grief I am not all unlearned;
Once through mine own doors Death did pass;
One went, who never hath returned.

He will not smile - not speak to me
Once more. Two years his chair is seen
Empty before us, that was he
Without whose life I had not been.

(11. 17-24)


"The Two Voices" is a poem Hallam Tennyson describes "as begun under the cloud of his overwhelming sorrow after the death of Arthur Hallam", news of which reached T. on 1 October 1833. This statement has not hitherto been disputed, but that T. had begun it before Hallam's death is clear from a letter by J.M. Kemble to W.B. Donne .... The letter is dated 'Saturday 22 June;' and from
not one, but two bereavements from 1833 onwards and the fragment "Semel" reflects the image and influence of his father.

Internal evidence ... it indubitably belongs to June 1833: "Next Sir arc some superb meditations on Self-destruction called 'Thoughts of a Suicide' wherein he argue the point with his soul and is thoroughly floored. These are amazingly fine and deep. ... 'Clearly a version of 'The two Voices' was already in existence'."

(The Poems of Tennyson, p. 52?).

It is obvious the poem was begun under the shadow of his father's death and absorbed that of Hallam's.

Faden, in Tennyson in Egypt, pp. 86-87, argues that the "Vorte d' Arthur" was written in memory of his father and not of Hallam as is generally assumed. He writes that Arthur Hallam's virtue was "potential rather than operative, his triumph was foreseen rather than achieved. In this he was unlike King Arthur. The 'Vorte d' Arthur' deals with the end, not the beginning, of an epoch.

The alternative is obvious. The reverend Dr. George Clayton Tennyson had died in 1831; he had been in his son's mind as a father the symbol of authority, as a priest the symbol of orthodox faith... that was, apparently, crumbling before invidious scepticisms."

In "From Sorrow Sorrow Yet is Born," he writes:

But leave not thou thy son forlorn;
Touch me, great Nature, make me live.

As when thy sunlights, a mild heat,
Touch some dun meer that sleepeth still;
As when thy moonlights, dim and sweet,
Touch some gray ruin on the hill.

(ll. 3-8).

Dr. Amalendu Bose, in Appendix B of his Tennyson's 'In Memoriam': A Revaluation, has shown that these lines were composed before Tennyson came to know of Hallam's death. They could then be the outpourings of his sorrow on his father's death.

Semele appears to symbolize his mother and Zeus his father, but as the poem progressed it seemed to become uncomplementary to his father, whom he truly loved, and it can be a reason for his neither taking it up for revision, nor ever publishing it in his lifetime. Semele, as the persona of his mother, can be said to be a first-person account of her being face to face with the trident wielding, bright sunlight-encircled form of Zeus as the persona of his father in his violent mood.

Tennyson has often identified 'love' with the sun. In "Fatima," the heroine cries:

O Love, Love, Love! O withering might!
O sun, that from thy noonday height
Shudderest when I strain my sight,
Throbbing through all thy heat and light,....

(ll. 1-4)

In another poem, "Love (Almighty Love)" the poet writes that love is a light "Before whose blaze my spirits shrink." (line 11). Paden too writes: "countless passages in Christian literature which identify God with Love...(as in Milton) figure him as the source of blinding light, [and that] there are a number of such passages that young Tennyson may have read...." 43

43. Paden, Tennyson in Egypt, note 107, p. 133.
In "Semele" Zeus is the amalgamation of all these symbolical presentations of 'Love' and 'God', akin to the sun, for he is both husband and god to her. She is consumed because of his heat and might. Tennyson's mother's plight is, metaphorically, the same. Her suffering and endurance for the sake of her love for her husband and children is fairly evident from Tennyson's, Hallam's, and Sir Charles Tennyson's accounts. The deep bond of love and understanding between the mother and children comes up again and again in his biographies. That is why, perhaps, when he writes on the subject of both his parents together, he cannot help but become somewhat uncomplimentary to his father. In "Isabel," references to him are as "a muddy" stream, "vex'd eddies" of a "wayward brother," a worn-out stem "which else had fallen quite." But in that poem he makes these references genuinely mild and sympathetic. This perhaps became too difficult to be managed in "Semele" and hence he left it half done. But even as a fragment, the poem is complementary to his mother. Semele is consumed by the blazing glory of Zeus. Yet even as she dies she forecasts that her unborn son Bacchus will create heavenly music to delight the world with his troop of Bacchanalians:

Rushing in cadence,
All in order,
Plunging down the viney valleys—

(11. 26-28).
Bacchus appears to stand for Tennyson himself, (the Bacchanalians for his troop of brothers and sisters), destined to be a great poet. It may be kept in mind that while their father often criticized them for their compositions, their mother kept their spirits up. "Semele" projects a mother's fulfilment in the survival of her children, even in her own death. It is difficult to say whether the myth has been purposely modified or it just happened that the role of Zeus, in saving Bacchus from the ashes and being kept in his (Zeus') thigh, got underplayed as the poet was carried away by his adoration for his mother. The very fact that he gave the poem up shows his own dissatisfaction with it.

Tennyson's mythical poems on women throw light on two major aspects of womanhood -- wifehood and motherhood. All of them are victims of their husband's caprice and suffer because of it. Oenone is an aggrieved wife who

44. Tennyson's elder brother Charles is quoted by Paden as saying in his old age that their father would never let them know what he thought of their poetry, and used to tell them to mind their books or else they could never get bread by such stuff.

(See Tennyson in Egypt, p. 19).

Charles Tennyson writes about Tennyson's mother: "... her sons owed much to her encouragement and enthusiastic belief in their powers. Poor Elizabeth! no doubt she spoiled as well as encouraged them...."

(Alfred Tennyson, pp. 14-15).
grieves due to her husband's infidelity. Semele is a simple woman who perishes because of her husband's overindulgence. Demeter is an aggrieved mother whose husband himself is responsible for the abduction of their daughter. Semele's motherhood, however, joys in the prospect of her children's future attainments even as she dies, while Demeter becomes the symbol of motherhood itself as she anxiously looks for her stolen daughter. The poet depicts her unabated and heart-rending search over hills and dales and changing seasons thus:

[...] ... went in search of thee
... ... ... ... ... ... ...
Among the wail of midnight winds, and cried
'Where is my loved one? Wherefore do ye wail?'
And out from all the night an answer shrilled,
'We know not, and we know not why we wail'.

(ll. 53-61)

She climbed the "Cliffs of all the seas" and asked the waves:

'Where? do ye make your moanings for my child?'
And round from all the world the voices came
'We know not, and we know not why we moan'.

(ll. 64-66).

This desolate goddess mother "started from every eagle peak," "peered through tomb and cave," 'thriddled' through the "black heart of all the woods" till she came to the Fates themselves, spinning "the lives of men," and even they
could not tell her of her lost child. She did not rest till she had discovered the whereabouts of her daughter, and on coming to know the complicity of the highest amongst the gods—Zeus himself, her own husband—in her agony she challenged even him as she cursed the "Gods of Heaven." Demeter's moving search, we surmise, is vibrant with the poet's own sorrow at the death of his son Lionel. "It tears me to pieces, he would say...." 45

A noteworthy fact that emerges at this juncture is the inordinately long time after which Tennyson undertook the composition of a poem on Greek mythology. When we take into consideration all the mythical poems of Tennyson (excluding the revised "Tithonun" and "Tiresias"), we find that "Demeter and Persephone" was composed after a gap of about fifty years. The mythical poems prior to this were "Ulysses," "Tithon," and "Tiresias," written on the death of Hallam between 1833-35. The intervening period was one of achievements and happiness for the poet. Tragedy had struck once again in the form of his son's death. This

45. Fausset writes:

"In April, 1886, he lost his son Lionel, who was returning from India. It was 'a grief as deep as life or thought'. The boy had always been so affectionate, unselfish and capable; a bright, useful future lay before him, and the thought of his lonely moonlight burial in the Red Sea, with all the waste of manhood it implied, and the unuttered farewells of a father's love, haunted the dreams of Tennyson. 'It tears me to pieces', he would say...."

(Tennyson, p. 276).
poem is related to it, although strangely enough, Hallam Tennyson in *A Memoir* does not mention any connection of this poem to Lionel's death. 46 Dahl establishes the link with the argument:

Through line 125 the poem is a strongly emotional account of the grieving mother's search for her lost daughter. Here the poem logically and dramatically could have ended. Demeter, having temporarily regained her daughter, once again blesses the fields; the rhythmic seasonal alternation of death and birth can begin. But, probably thinking of the very recent loss of his son Lionel..., Tennyson is unsatisfied by the simple pagan narrative and adds to it his "frame" of Christian hope.... 47

The sources of this poem are "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and *Fasti*. As motherhood

46. In *A Memoir*, II, p. 364, about the sources of "Demeter and Persephone," Hallam simply writes:

"The poem from which the book was named was written at my request, because I knew that he considered Demeter one of the most beautiful types of motherhood."


Pater writes that the myth of Demeter is unique in itself. Although "Alien in some respects from the genuine traditions of Greek mythology, a relic of the earlier inhabitants of Greece, and having but a subordinate place in the religion of Homer, it yet asserted its interest, little by little, and took a complex hold on the minds of the Greeks, becoming finally the central and the most popular subject of their national worship."

(Greek Studies, 1895; rpt., London: Macmillan and Co.Ltd., 1922, p.81).
was the chief concern of the poet, he leaves out incidents like the goddess's serving as a nurse to Demophoon, Metaneira's discovery of her putting the child in fire, and her eventual departure from Celeus' palace and later brooding in the temple built in her honour by the king. Tennyson's treatment of the myth is not a mere knitting together of material from the sources but creative. 49

The poem begins after Persephone has been won back and brought to her (Demeter) on the fields of Enna, and ends with the mother and daughter embracing each other as Persephone gradually gets accustomed to the daylight and her surroundings. Demeter, in the meanwhile, narrates her own suffering at her loss and her wild, untiring, search until she finally gets her back. The main thrust in this poem is on the union of mother and daughter through the power of motherhood. The poet's

extraordinary insight into the nature of myth, his ability to relate a private or social distress to the radical dualities of human experience, makes a poetic triumph out of personal despair. 50

49. Tennyson had said to his biographer son Hallam that he did not wish to give "a mere réchauffé of old legends." His attempt was to put them in a new frame with something modern about them.

(See A Memoir, II, p. 364).

Tennyson's Demeter assumes the character of the universal mother. She embodies the spirit of motherhood in its various manifestations:

Child, when thou wert gone,
I envied human wiven, and nestedit birds,
Yes, the cubbed lioness; went in search of thee
Through many a palace, many a cot, and gave
Thy breast to ailing infants in the night.

(ll. 52-55).

Demeter is consoled only when she wins back Persephone from Hades and her 'Dark One'. The power of motherhood subdues even the gods. Through the establishment of this power the poet also seems to establish his own faith in the immortality of the soul.

It can be said that just as the set of poems, "The Choric Songs," represents Tennyson's view of art, the group of poems on Greek mythical women epitomize his concept of women. And just as his love of art had taken roots in his young mind at Somersby, his concept of women had been imperceptibly formulated by the constant company of his often ill-used mother, and the rapport that existed between him and her.

In the poems grouped as Tennyson's poems with mythical Greek women as protagonists we find undertones of a tension between the poet's devotion to pure art and his sense of social responsibility. The poems can be taken
to be a continuation of the theme of "The Choric Songs" at a subterranean level. In "Hero to Leander," Hero is akin to the Nymphs, and the island in her abode. She tries to restrain Leander, the artist, from taking a plunge into the stormy sea of life and cross it in its violent state. The Garden of the Heuperidon is symbolic of the world of art in "The Heuperidon" and the 'golden apple' of its creation. In "Oenone" the golden apple in the 'guerdon' of beauty. The conflict among the goddesses is a projection of the conflict within the poet himself, the conflict between his instinctive leaning towards art-for-art's sake and the compulsion of the duty imposed on him. The choice of Paris is crucial as it is not a free choice between pure art and reality like that of the Lotos-Eaters. It is severely limited for in "Oenone" it boils down to his choice of Helen, the "guerdon," and not Aphrodite, the principle of pure art. Valerie Pitt makes the following observation on the lines from "Oenone" quoted below:

What he chooses is not an Aphrodite who represents the charms of the aesthetic life, but the bait she holds out to him, the wanton Helen. The presence of Oenone, the discarded mistress, defines the status of his choice; it is not a noble worship of beauty but an illicit love. The overtones of sensual self-indulgence in the description of Aphrodite are transferred to his choice.

Idalian Aphrodite beautiful,  
Fresh as the foam, now-bathed in Paphian wells,  
With rosy slender fingers backward drew  
From her warm brows and bosom her deep hair  
Ambrosial, golden round her lucid throat  
And shoulder; from the violets her light foot  
Shone rosy-white, and o'er her rounded form  
Between the shadows of the vine-bunches  
Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.  

(ll. 170-178).

Pallas, the goddess of reason and war, had offered him a  
"life of self-achievement." In refusing her offer for the  
sake of Helen, he chooses not art but sensual self-  
indulgence which destroys both him and Ilion. The Lotos-  
Eaters of "The Choric Songs" opted for pure art which resulted  
in their withdrawal from the world of social responsibility  
into that of the contemplation of art. "Demeter and Persephone,"  
too, has been interpreted as an allegory of poetic creativity.  
Stange says:

... the Vale of Enna, closely resembles certain recurrent  
scenes in Tennyson's poetry, locations which are symbolic  
of the proper home of the spirit.... Persephone ...  
clearly the personification of fertility ... may also  
express the principle of poetic creativity ....  

and elaborates

The descent and the resurrection of Persephone are ...  
Tennyson's sense of the poet's penetration of the realm  
of imagination, of the forbidden region of shadows which  
must be entered before the highest beauty or the highest  
meaning of experience may be perceived.  

52. Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate, p. 53.  
53(b). Ibid., p. 144.
Viewed in this light, "Semele" may be said to be a variation on the same theme. Parallel to Persephone's descent and resurrection can be put Semele's annihilation on being face to face with the light of the greatest and highest experience, which both annihilates and creates. While Semele perishes, the creation germinating in her lives on. The 'truth' of life and 'experience' alone give birth to pure poetry. In "Demeter and Persephone" it is realized through the 'Dark One', in "Semele," through his brother, the 'Bright one'. Both "Semele" and "Demeter and Persephone" can be treated as myths of regeneration and creation, wherein Semele and Demeter are like the poet. Stange says that Demeter is akin to the sensitive mind searching for creativity. 54 Both the poems may then be said to celebrate (what Stange says for the third section of only "Demeter and Persephone") "the precarious triumph of life and fertility over death," 55 as Demeter says to Persephone: "So in this pleasant vale we stand again,/ The field of Enna now once more ablaze/ With flowers that brighten as thy footstep falls..." (ll. 34-36).

In "Semele," as she is being consumed by the blazing brightness of the "Bright One," Semele says to Bacchus: "But

55. Ibid., p. 145.
thou, my son, who shalt be born/ When I am a elder, to
delight the world" (ll. 17-13) with the troop of

Bacchanalesians,
Rushing in cadence,
All in order,
Plunging down the viney valleys...

(ll. 25-28).

Here the "viney valleys" can be equated with Elysium or
the fields of Enna. But Stange points out that Tennyson's
field of Enna "intentionally echoes ... Milton's description
of the Garden of Eden"56:

Not that faire field
Of Enna where Proserpin gathering flource,
Herself a fairer Floure by gloomie Dig
Was gathered, which caused Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the World...
"... might with this Paradise"
Of Eden strive....

(Paradise Lost, Bk IV, ll. 268-275).

He continues:

Imaginary places analogous to the Eden garden
are abundant in Tennyson's poems; they usually
suggest a refuge from active life, a retreat
to the past (as in "The Hesperides" and"Maud"),
or a sacred bower of poetic inspiration (as in
"The Poet's Mind"). 57

56. The lines from Paradise Lost, Bk IV, quoted, and
commented on, by G.K. Stange, op.cit., p. 145.

57. Ibid., pp. 145-146.
Mt. Ida may be added to the list of these locations along with the Isle of the Sea-Fairies and the Lotos-Isle.

Although some of these poems were composed after a lapse of more than fifty years, Tennyson's basic approach to Greek myths remained the same. For him they were vehicles for the expression of his innermost concerns and conflicts as well as his concepts and creed. These poems on Greek mythical women reflect his views on love, marriage, and motherhood on the one hand, and are related to "The Choric Songs," (Chapter I), on the other, for along with them they throw light on his attitude towards the relationship between art and the artist.