

Mariana Reimagined:
Shakespeare and Tennyson in Millais's *Mariana*
(1850-51)

ASANO Naoko

Abstract

Mariana (1850-51) by John Everett Millais (1829-96) is one of the three principal works based on Shakespeare's plays during his Pre-Raphaelite period (1848-53): Precisely, it is not directly inspired by a Shakespearean play (*Measure for Measure*) but by a Tennyson poem, "Mariana" (1830), unlike the other two works; *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1848-49) and *Ophelia* (1851-52). In this sense, Tennyson's own interpretation and imagination stand as a filter between Shakespeare and Millais. As in the other two works, in his representation of Mariana, Millais was faithful to the original text—in this case of Tennyson—in conceiving his version of Mariana. Simultaneously, a distance from the original source by Shakespeare must have allowed the artist to experiment with his own imagination, and it also reflects Millais's own interpretation of the character of Mariana.

This paper explores various elements of Millais's *Mariana*, considering certain aspects from its source texts: For example, the claustrophobic space and nature around "the moated grange" in Millais's work are compared with the landscape rendered by Tennyson's language and the original atmosphere of the grange in Shakespeare's text. It also examines another element which underlines the distance between the painting and the two literary sources; musicality. Regarding the contemporaneity of the work, Mariana's practice of embroidery is then discussed, since it possibly echoes a particular domestic activity imposed on Victorian women. Additionally, the contemporary Victorian culture of 'reading Shakespeare' especially for women, and the appeal of the figure of the forsaken woman are explored, considering the possible empathy *Mariana* evoked among its first beholders. Finally, it discusses the female sexuality which separates Millais's Mariana from a femme fatale and a virginal woman.

Through the whole, it has examined three different images of Mariana by Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Millais respectively. As primary sources, it has looked into Shakespeare's plays, Tennyson's poems, Millais's paintings, the letters and diaries of two Victorian contemporaries, Millais and Tennyson, as well as Victorian comments and criticism on Shakespeare, Tennyson and Pre-Raphaelites, including Millais. As for secondary sources, the studies of

Victorian culture of Shakespeare and the cult of Tennyson have been explored, and research by modern scholars such as Prettejohn and Rosenfeld has been consulted for an examination of the works of Millais and his Pre-Raphaelite peers. Overall, this study aims to seek to what extent a Shakespearean source might have influenced Millais's representation via Tennyson's.