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Sexual Exploration of the Pastoral:  
Analyzing Queer Desire in “Goblin Market” and *In Memoriam*

by

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of the requirements for the degree of

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## Introduction

Although pastoral literature is an ideal medium to return to the past, can it be used to explore something new? This is the question that I seek to answer through my analysis of two Victorian poems: “Goblin Market” by Christina Rossetti and *In Memoriam* by Alfred Tennyson. *In Memoriam* is a pastoral elegy that focuses on the grief that Tennyson feels after losing his beloved friend, Arthur Hallam. Meanwhile, “Goblin Market” centers on two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, who live in the countryside. Every day, they encounter goblin merchants who attempt to sell their exotic fruits to young maidens. Despite knowing that she should not eat the fruit, Laura falls to temptation, and becomes ill. It is then up to Lizzie to save her, which she achieves by using her own body as Laura’s medicine. Although Tennyson and Rossetti’s work vary in many different ways, there are two key commonalities that I believe make it fitting to put them together for an analysis: the presence of both the pastoral and queer desire. Tennyson laments that the townsfolk do not understand what he is going through, even going as far as to suggest that they find him shameful. As a result, he seeks out the pastoral, a form that allows him to properly grieve and learn to cope. Meanwhile, the pastoral imagery in “Goblin Market” is used to illustrate the mental state of the sisters as they learn how to navigate their newfound sexual feelings. Using these poems, I argue that the pastoral is a place to explore queer desire.

Pastoral literature has often been a source of comfort for its audience. The often romanticized depictions of country life are highly appealing. The mode illustrates the simple but content lives of shepherds, likely a stark contrast from the lives that the audience lead, with each generation finding themselves further away from attaining this dream as industrialization expands. Terry Gifford addresses this yearning in his book, *Pastoral*, which dives into the history of the tradition, such as the construction of Arcadia. In addressing this history, Gifford answers

the question of why the pastoral has become such a long-standing and prominent genre: “pastoral is essentially escapist in seeking refuge in the country and often also in the past; that it is a selective ‘reflection’ on past country life in which old settled values are ‘rescued’...that all this functions as a simplified ‘reconstruction’ of what is, in fact, a more complex reality” (Gifford 7). No matter how much things may change, readers have the ability to temporarily escape and return to how the world “should be.”

Although the pastoral is a long-standing literary tradition, there seems to be a lot of confusion and disagreements about how to define the genre. For example, there are some critics who believe that landscape is the defining characteristic of pastoral literature. One such critic is Ken Hiltner, who writes that pastoral literature is a form of nature writing: “when confronted with an environment wildly in flux, these artists sometimes turn away from representation and its challenges, choosing instead to gesture to what lies outside of the work” (Hiltner 5). Even before climate change became a prominent issue, fears about the environment have been around since the rise of industrialization. Hiltner argues that influential writers, such as Ben Jonson and Abraham Cowley, wrote pastoral work as a response to these fears. From this perspective, the pastoral genre serves as a reminder of what the world used to be like and can encourage others to be more environmentally conscious.

Other scholars, however, such as Paul Alpers, disagree with this assertion. In his piece, “What is Pastoral?” he addresses the fact that every critic seems to have their own idea of what “pastoral” means and explains that many of these definitions are either too vague or overly simplistic. He then goes on to state that the misrepresentation of the pastoral is due to scholars placing too much emphasis on the landscape. Alpers finds this problematic, because he believes that shepherds are the heart of the genre: “To take shepherds and their lives as central to the

mode accounts for the range of interests—social, ethical, erotic, and poetic—that pastoral has historically expressed” (Alpers 459). By itself, landscape cannot explore the interests that Alpers calls attention to. There needs to be human interaction with the landscape, or else the piece will simply just become an ode to nature. With this idea in mind, the theory of the pastoral that is the most capacious and useful for my argument is exploring the relationship between the landscape and the characters within the poems. Although I do not necessarily agree with Hiltner’s argument that nature is the defining characteristic of the pastoral, it also cannot be treated as if it is simply an aesthetically pleasing backdrop. As we surmised from Gifford’s piece, it is meant to be a refuge from the problems that the readers may be experiencing in their lives. By applying Alpers’s ideas about the shepherds, and analyzing how the pastoral plays a role in their lives, we are able to see what issue the author’s work may be a refuge from.

One concept that comes into view when one looks at the interaction between landscape and people is the “queer pastoral,” a concept introduced by Vin Nardizzi that describes how “gay scholars and authors (and others) have used this homoerotic literary and artistic tradition to imagine a queer history” (citation needed). For instance, by means of its pastoral setting, which expresses “the idealized, bucolic ‘naturalness’ of pastoral homoeroticism,” the film (*Brokeback Mountain*) “calls into question the idea that heterosexuality is the only ‘natural’ sex around” (Nardizzi 569-570). Queer pastoral literature and film, then, calls into question the notion that heterosexuality is the only “normal” kind of romantic/erotic bond. It does this by employing the pastoral setting to depict queer desire as natural. Nardizzi goes on to apply the notion of the queer pastoral to William Shakespeare’s, *As You Like It*. The story centers on a heroine, Rosalind, who has been exiled by the court. She is joined by her cousin, Celia, because she cannot bear the thought of being apart from Rosalind. Nardizzi argues that Celia’s willingness to alienate herself

is indicative of female homoeroticism and that the pastoral gives her the space to act on her queer desire. For example, Nardizzi points to Celia's willingness to share her wealth with Rosalind: "Even if we regard Celia's words as a form of rhetorical compensation, it nonetheless has material effect outside the court, since Aliena and Ganymede, which is Rosalind's disguise, soon co-purchase a cottage, pasture, and the flock with this wealth" (Nardizzi 575). Soon after the girls arrive at the countryside, Celia quickly purchases them a home. Now sharing a home and a flock, the girls begin to live a queer domestic lifestyle fantasy, which is particularly enabled by Rosalind's disguise as a man. They would have never been able to have this kind of relationship while they were at court. It would have been deemed ridiculous, not just because of the pastoral lifestyle is incompatible with their status as ladies, but also because of the underlying expectation that they would both get married to men. But by moving to the countryside, they are able to start new lives where they do not have to feel inclined to abide by heterosexuality. It is only when the court begins to trickle back into their lives, leading them to their eventual return, that the notion of compulsory heterosexuality returns once more.

In addition to Nardizzi, I will be employing other queer scholarship throughout this paper. One piece that has helped me considerably in framing my research is *Before Queer Theory: Victorian Aestheticism and the Self* by Dustin Friedman. He contends that the social oppression that queer Victorian writers faced actually granted them mental liberation. A huge part of this argument lies in the idea of "erotic negativity," which refers to individuals who refuse to adhere to societal conventions, even at the expense of social rejection. Queer writers would accept this rejection, but would use it to fuel their work, making aestheticism an important aspect of Victorian queer theory. Friedman's focus on queer aestheticism complements pastoral studies, due to the idyllic imagery that is often found in the poetry. Another text that has been beneficial

to my research is *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* by Linda Dowling. Her argument centers on Oscar Wilde's infamous three trials, where he would be found guilty of "acts of gross indecency" under the Labouchere Amendment Act. In his attempt to defend himself, Wilde defended homosexual desire by stating that it could be found in the works of Plato, Shakespeare, and Michaelangelo. Dowling follows Wilde's line of thought and examines the cultural effect that arose from Victorian scholars studying classical literature and philosophy: "Greek studies operated as a 'homosexual code' during the great age of English university reform, working invisibly to establish the grounds on which, after its shorter-term construction as a nineteenth-century sexual pathology...[it] would subsequently emerge as the locus of sexual identity" (Dowling 4). Dowling believes that Victorian England was suffering from feelings of inadequacy and stagnation. On top of the decline of imperialism, this time period was also witnessing the rise of industrialization. It made many feel like they were dispensable, due to machines being able to do the work that they once had. Scholars started to look for the answers about England's future by studying Greek culture. In doing so, they discovered that male love was prominently featured in these works that they have always revered. As a result, the perception about homosexuality slowly began to shift. Dowling's research is relevant, because the pastoral is a classical mode and classicism becomes increasingly connected with homoeroticism; thus, evoking the classical, through the use of the pastoral, is also to evoke queer desire. Moreover, Dowling recognizes that her analysis means that new ideas are founded upon history, which is the crux of my argument that the pastoral is used as a means to explore newfound queer feelings.

In addition to these texts, which apply to both Tennyson and Rossetti, I will also be using queer theory that is specific to each poem. In regard to *In Memoriam*, I will be using ideas from

*Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* by Richard Dellamora. In this book, Dellamora examines what both queerness and masculinity looked like during the Victorian era. He achieves this by looking at several prominent authors from this period, including Tennyson. Specifically, he provides insight into what the relationship between Tennyson and Hallam was like. He then turns his attention to passages of *In Memoriam* that demonstrate Tennyson's queer desire. Although Dellamora believes that Tennyson is purposefully holding back from showing just how deep that desire is, he still manages to broaden the scope of masculinity at the time. I will also be using "A Possible Site for Contested Manliness: Landscape and the Pastoral in the Victorian Era" by Claire Lawrence. Lawrence acknowledges that there has been plenty of focus on the pastoral as a concept in *In Memoriam*, but believes that Tennyson's attention to connecting the pastoral to the poem's structure has been overlooked: "*In Memoriam's* chronology is seasonal: each change marks a different point in Tennyson's cycle of mourning over Hallam's death. There is also a returning set of images taken from the natural world (birds, trees, landscapes, the sea, weather) which are part of the repetitions that lend coherence to the poem's form" (Lawrence 25). The poem takes place over the course of around two and a half to three years, evidenced by the fact we see Christmases take place. During that time, we see Tennyson's perspective about death slowly start to change as he goes through the stages of grief. This detail provides a much better understanding of how Tennyson addresses his queer desire. At the start of the poem, a point that Dellamora also notes, we see Tennyson hold himself back from expressing how much Hallam means to him. However, as Tennyson starts to accept that Hallam is gone, he also becomes more open about his homoerotic feelings. In addition to her argument, Lawrence also provides a lot of context about how the pastoral has been perceived by scholars and the public alike.

As for the queer theory that is geared towards “Goblin Market,” I will be using ideas from *Between Women* by Sharon Marcus. She analyzes the bonds that existed between Victorian women, which she breaks into three categories: familial, platonic, and erotic. A key conclusion that she comes to is that women in the nineteenth century were able to form a deeply intimate bond that they simply could not replicate with men. Victorian society would go on to depend on this dynamic, because it prepared women for heterosexual marriage. Additionally, I use “‘Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me’: The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’” by Mary Carpenter. Carpenter points to the uniquely feminist perspective that Rossetti had from directly associating with prostitutes: “In particular, her immediate experience with the interaction between prostitutes and women’s religious communities may have constructed Rossetti’s representation of a ‘marketplace’ in which ‘appetite’ puts a woman at risk, but where her salvation is to be found not in controlling her appetite but in turning to another woman” (Carpenter 417). Although Carpenter recognizes that Rossetti’s perspective arose from her homosocial relationship with the prostitutes, she believes that exposure to women’s sexuality (particularly the social problems they experienced) led to Rossetti writing this poem through a homoerotic lens. Allowing the reader, especially when the intended audience is believed to be the prostitutes she was assisting, to “consume” a story about female sexuality through the male gaze would be counterintuitive to everything she has learned and everything that she wants to teach, since she seeks to bring the prostitutes back towards a religious path. So instead, she teaches them that salvation can be found by relying on other women; she drives that point home by employing the use of the female gaze and consequently making the story homoerotic.

## “Goblin Market” Analysis

Rossetti’s poem uses imagery of the pastoral landscape. However, these images often have a double meaning that speaks to a larger theme or issue. One of the clearest examples, from a stanza that I will be analyzing later on, is when Laura tells the goblins that she has no money:

And all my gold is on the furze  
That shakes in windy weather  
Above the rusty heather.

(Rossetti 6.6-8)

Although Laura’s reply is clearly figurative, she is able to form it based on the beautiful pastoral fields that surround her. In particular, furze and heathers were usually only found in the countryside. In addition to Laura’s comment being figurative, we also see layers of foreshadowing and irony due to her choice of flowers. Furze is regarded as being a symbol of love. Laura stating that “all her gold” is on it, is foreshadowing the value that love plays in the poem. Meanwhile, the heather is generally seen as a symbol of protection, but Laura is completely unaware of the danger that she is in by interacting with the goblin men.

Perhaps the biggest skepticism directed towards my choice to classify “Goblin Market” as a pastoral piece would be that none of the characters are shepherds. The shepherd has become an iconic figure in pastoral literature, bordering on being a symbol. The general consensus, stated quite bluntly by pastoral critic Leo Marx, is “No shepherd, no pastoral” (Marx). While I do understand Marx’s stance since the shepherd has played a major role in the formulation of the genre, I ultimately disagree. For one, while the task of shepherding is omitted in Laura and Lizzie’s list of chores, they do a considerable amount of farm work:

Fetch’d in honey, milk’d the cows,

Air'd and set to rights the house,  
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,  
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,  
Next churn'd butter, whipp'd up cream,  
Fed their poultry, sat and sew'd.

(Rossetti 9.5-10)

To suggest that a work is not pastoral because it does not include shepherds erases, and consequently invalidates, the other jobs that exist in the countryside. It is also an extremely gendered view, given that many of the jobs that Rossetti lists here are typically regarded as being feminine responsibilities. While shepherding may be important, the rural lifestyle cannot function on it solely. Laura and Lizzie's chores help ensure that the community can continue to live contentedly. Furthermore, Marx's stance inadvertently suggests that the genre cannot evolve, which is problematic given how long it has existed. Instead, I agree with Alpers, who states: "Literary value consists precisely in breaking old molds, doing some kind of violence to received conventions and forms of expression" (Alpers 440-441). While newer pastoral poems like Rossetti's will undoubtedly take influence from their predecessors, as evidenced by factors like the landscape and theme, it is unrealistic to expect them to essentially be rewrites of the older works. Authors contribute to the genre by experimenting with the form and writing works that will particularly resonate with their audience.

"Goblin Market" centers on two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, who live in the countryside. Every night, the girls hear the calls of goblin men, who are merchants that try to sell exotic fruit to maidens. Despite the fact that the girls were taught not to look at the goblin men, Laura cannot contain her curiosity and finally takes a peep at them. The goblin men take Laura's glance as an

invitation, and they begin to barter with her. Even though Laura has no money, they accept a “golden curl” atop her head as a form of payment. Laura is delighted by the taste of the fruit, and proceeds to gorge herself until her lips become sore. She is eager to buy more fruit the next day, but to her horror, she realizes that she can no longer see or hear the goblin men. Her yearning for the fruit causes her to become gravely ill. Worried about her sister’s health, Lizzie decides to buy fruit from the goblin men and bring it back home to give to Laura. However, when Lizzie refuses to eat with the goblin men, they quickly become violent. They beat her, tear her clothes off, and try to force her to swallow the juice of the fruit. But Lizzie holds firm, and although her body is drenched in the fruit’s dew, she does not consume any of it. After this encounter, Lizzie runs home and tells Laura: “eat me, drink me, love me” (Rossetti 24.8). Laura obliges, and spends the night kissing and sucking on Lizzie’s body. The next morning, the girls discover that Laura has made a complete recovery. At the end of the poem, Rossetti reveals that years after their encounter with the goblin men, the girls have both gotten married and have children. They tell the children about the days of their youth, even the “fruits like honey to the throat/But poison in the blood” (Rossetti 29.12-13). But they would reassure the children by telling them about Lizzie’s strength in the face of adversity, as well as the power of sisterly love.

The relationship between the girls rapidly changes throughout the course of the poem. While there is nothing in the beginning of the poem that is overtly queer, we quickly begin to see a few aspects of their relationship that are a little odd. For one, Laura and Lizzie appear to live by themselves. Rossetti does not mention any kind of parental figure for the girls, nor any other siblings. This absence of family already begins to skew their sisterly dynamic considerably. They have no one to take care of them, so they have to rely on each other. The most obvious example of this care is when Lizzie cures Laura, but it is also apparent through their choice to split the

chores and run the home together. Naturally, this creates a very intimate bond between the two girls, who even sleep in the same bed together “breast to breast” (Rossetti 8.14). In many ways, this relationship already comes across as being a female marriage, which was not unheard of during the Victorian era. In her influential book, *Between Women*, Sharon Marcus addresses the characteristics of what this kind of relationship would look like: “Women in female marriages created relationships that, like legal marriage, did the work assigned to sexuality in the nineteenth century: the management of shared households, the transmission of property, the expression of emotional and religious affect, and the development and care of the self” (Marcus 194). Laura and Lizzie’s relationship possesses almost every single characteristic that Marcus enumerates. They live together, run the household together, and have a bond that has taught them how to take care of each other, and by extension, themselves. The only quality that seems to be missing, at least in the manner that Marcus presumably means, is the expression of emotional affect. The girls clearly care deeply for each other, which is shown through their concern for how the goblin men will affect the other. However, this seemingly sisterly concern goes on to become homoerotic. This change is brought about by the goblins.

The sexually predatory nature of the goblins is slowly revealed. Almost immediately, we learn that only maidens can see and hear them. Maidens are often depicted as being naive and vulnerable, so the fact that the goblins are exclusively seeking them out is already a crucial hint about their predatory ways. However, while it may initially come across as odd, Rossetti does not depict the goblins as being these horrifyingly grotesque creatures. Instead, they take on the appearance of normal animals:

One had a cat’s face,

One whisk’d a tail,

One tramp'd at a rat's pace,  
One crawl'd like a snail,  
One like a wombat prowld obtuse and furry,  
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.

(Rossetti 3.24-29)

Many of these animals, such as the cat and the ratel, are arguably quite cute. At the very least, they are generally not the type of animals that one would envision when they hear the word “predator.” But it is this disconnect between perception and reality that makes Rossetti’s depiction of the goblins so clever. If they looked frightening and dangerous, they would most likely scare the maidens away. But since they look like cute and harmless animals, the maidens are more likely to engage with them. In addition to their deceiving appearances, Rossetti continues her use of animal imagery through the goblin’s voices:

She heard a voice like voice of doves  
Cooing all together:  
They sounded kind and full of loves  
In the pleasant weather.

(Rossetti 3.30-33)

By their appearance alone, the goblin men have already established a level of trust from their clientele. That trust, however, can quickly dissipate when the goblins try to persuade them to buy the fruit. If the goblins had low and gravelly voices, or perhaps some kind of wicked undertone, the maidens would be wary of buying the fruit, especially after hearing about the reputation of the goblin men. So instead, they trick the maidens by sounding angelic. It makes the maidens wonder why they were ever taught to stay away from the goblin men in the first place.

When Laura makes the decision to peep at them, causing them to come and barter with her, they refuse to take no for an answer. While this may not seem out of the ordinary, as the persistent merchant trope is almost stereotypical, what makes their bartering particularly noteworthy is that they do not leave Laura alone after she says that she has no money:

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:

“Good folk, I have no coin;

To take were to purloin:

I have no copper in my purse

I have no silver either

And all my gold is on the furze

That shakes in windy weather

Above the rusty heather.

You have much gold upon your head

They answer’d all together:

Buy from us with a golden curl

She clipp’d a precious golden lock,

She dropp’d a tear more rare than pearl.

(Rossetti 6.1-13)

Before I do a deep analysis of this stanza’s content, I would like to call attention to the way that it is structured. Throughout the poem, Rossetti alternates between rhyming and non-rhyming stanzas. At this point, she opts to maintain rhyme because it is one of the most crucial plot points of the poem. Laura’s resolve has already wavered. She is not being held back due to any feelings of hesitancy or distrust. She simply does not have any money, an issue which she presents by

starting the stanza's rhyme scheme. The goblin men recognize that she needs a final push forward. So, they present her with a solution to her problem, which they reinforce not only by continuing Laura's rhyme, but by adding to the golden imagery that she put forth. In doing so, especially when combined with their cute faces and harmonious "voice of doves," they have successfully concealed every aspect of their predatory nature, leading them to ensnare their prey.

The fact that the merchants are accepting an alternative form of payment indicates that money is not what incentivizes them to sell the fruit, but rather the opportunity to corrupt maidens. This notion is further reinforced by the fact that Laura pays with her own body, represented by the lock of hair that she gives the goblins. As Mary Wilson Carpenter explores in her article, "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me,': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'" Laura's hair is often thought to symbolize her virginity: "When they tell her she does not need any money because they will be happy with a 'golden curl,' she hands over this emblem of her virginity with only a single tear. Her 'feminine guessiness as to means' – her naïvete about the marketplace – has condemned her to a loss far greater than she knows" (Carpenter 427). In this interpretation, the sexually predatory nature of the goblins is undeniable. Laura, in her naïveté, assumed that she was essentially getting the fruit for free. However, she was paying with something much more valuable than silver or gold: her innocence. And had it not been for Lizzie's sacrifice, she would have ultimately ended up paying with her life as well.

Since the goblins are sexually predatory towards maidens, it is not a stretch to interpret the fruit as representing forbidden sexuality. The way that Rossetti depicts Laura consuming the fruit is almost blatantly sexual:

Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red:  
Sweeter than honey from the rock,

Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,  
Clearer than water flow'd that juice;  
She never tasted such before,  
How should it cloy with length of use?  
She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more  
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;  
She suck'd until her lips were sore;  
Then flung the emptied rinds away.

(Rossetti 6.14-23)

Instead of words like “drank” or “gulped,” Rossetti specifically chooses the word “suck’d” which she would go on to repeat multiple times. This choice carries very sexual undertones, especially since it is being done to attain the “juice” of the fruit. With this in mind, along with the line of thought that Laura is giving away her virginity to the goblin men, this excerpt is a description of her sexual awakening. The illness that she suffers from afterwards is Laura’s fall from grace, which Carpenter also explores in her article. She points to the uniquely feminist perspective that Rossetti had, since she was a devout Catholic sister who would help give housing and food to destitute prostitutes, often called “fallen women.” With this knowledge of Rossetti’s background in mind, Carpenter argues that Laura can be interpreted as the fallen woman and Lizzie as the sister who saves her.

The relationship between the fallen woman and the sister may come across as being hierarchical, with the sister holding moral superiority over the fallen woman. The reality is that both sets of women were considered to be on equal footing: “Like the discourses of nineteenth-century male artists, the discourses of the Oxford Movement also reveal a fear of

contamination. But while the male artists' imagery suggests a fear of physical and moral pollution from the prostitute's body, male clerics appear to have feared that the sisters would be contaminated by the attractions of the fallen women and their way" (Carpenter 423). The sisters were criticized for trying to help the fallen women. Society feared that they would plague the sisters with their moral failings, sometimes just through the association alone. The potentiality of Lizzie becoming "contaminated" is apparent when she decides to buy the fruit for Laura, knowingly subjecting herself to the predatory ways of the goblin men:

They trod and hustled her,  
Elbow'd and jostled her,  
Claw'd with their nails,  
Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,  
Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,  
Stamp'd upon her tender feet,  
Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits  
Against her mouth to make her eat.  
(Rossetti 20.37-45)

This scene is starkly different from Laura's interaction with the goblins. Laura almost immediately accepted the fruit from them and had an immensely pleasurable experience. But Lizzie's scene is akin to attempted rape, with the goblins even going as far as to strip her while they tried to force her to eat the fruit. One might go as far as to say they contaminated her on a physical level, since they squirt the juice all over her body. Despite her trauma, however, she does not succumb to the act of "falling" due to the actions of the goblins. Her love for Laura

gives her the strength to fight back against the goblins, until they finally release her. Her refusal prevents her from being “contaminated” on a mental level, undoubtedly saving her life.

That note of course brings us to the most iconic stanza of the poem. In order to cure Laura, Lizzie attempts to buy the fruit from the goblin men but refuses to eat it. The goblin men attempt to force her to eat it, spilling the juice of the fruit all over her body, but she fiercely resists. When they finally relent, Lizzie rushes home, crying out to Laura:

“Come and kiss me.  
Never mind my bruises,  
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeez’d from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
Eat me, drink me, love me;  
Laura, make much of me;  
For your sake I have braved the glen  
And had to do with goblin merchant men.”

(Rossetti 24.3-11)

This stanza is easily the most sexually charged part of the poem. The requests themselves, such as kissing and sucking, are already quite erotic since the juice is all over Lizzie’s body. But the urgency of Lizzie’s requests also come across as sexual excitement. She rushes through the door, and rather than begin with the explanation and then give the demands, her enthusiasm causes her to do the opposite. Furthermore, she does not just stop at one request, which would have gotten her point across. She makes a total of eight requests, emphasizing just how willing she is to give herself to Laura. Now, there are certainly heteronormative explanations for some of these

requests. Laura needs the juice, and the only way for her to realistically get it is by “drinking” or sucking on Lizzie. Even the phrase “eat me,” a phrase that is often associated with cunnilingus, could theoretically be brushed aside. After all, she did attain the juice from the same kind of fruit that Laura ate. However, the one phrase that cannot be invalidated is “love me.” Unlike the other requests, it serves no practicality to the matter at hand. But in tandem with the other requests, it indicates that Lizzie knows on some level the implications of what she is asking Laura to do. But despite possessing that knowledge, she still eagerly wants to have this sexual encounter with her.

The morning after Laura and Lizzie’s sexual night together, Rossetti reverts back to her use of pastoral imagery:

But when the first birds chirp’d about their eaves,  
And early reapers plodded to the place  
Of golden sheaves,  
And dew-wet grass  
Bow’d in the morning winds so brisk to pass,  
And new buds with new day  
Open’d of cup-like lilies on the stream,  
Laura awoke as from a dream,  
Laugh’d in the innocent old way.

(Rossetti 28.7-15)

As expected, there is a stark contrast between this stanza and the one that uses the desert to depict Laura’s distress. The desert stanza describes an unquenchable thirst that is exacerbated by heat. However, the stanza where Laura wakes up uses harmonious pastoral imagery to indicate Laura’s spiritual rejuvenation. Something else that stands out about this passage, especially when

compared to the other one, is Rossetti almost subtly mentioning the accessibility of water. From the dew on the grass to the stream, water surrounds Laura, representing that she no longer wants for anything. This reasoning would also explain why there is no visual of Laura drinking the water or interacting with it in any way. Her thirst has already been quenched by kissing and sucking on Lizzie.

Rossetti's choice to wind down the events of the poem on this note emphasizes how queerness and the pastoral come together. In addition to the pastoral being used to reflect Laura's mental state, the closeness of the girls at the beginning of the poem can also be somewhat attributed to the pastoral. In addition to their other chores, Rossetti even mentions that the girls directly work with livestock, which is quite similar to shepherding. The setting and lifestyle that the pastoral grants them allows the girls to easily fall into the female marriage that I mentioned earlier, including the management of the shared household and property. These aspects of their lives led to the two of them having a strong bond, since they have learned that they can always rely on each other. The devotion they have towards each other set up the framework for their erotic encounter. To briefly return to Marcus's argument, their queer encounter does admittedly end up preparing them for normative heterosexual lives. But in many ways, this heteronormativity feels compulsory, particularly because the husbands are only mentioned and not seen. In any case, their marriages do not erase the fact that they learned to be good wives to their husbands by first being good wives to each other. And the girls never let it be erased, since they continuously tell their children that the reason why they were able to survive their encounter with the goblin men is because of the love that they share for each other.

## *In Memoriam*

*In Memoriam* is generally classified as a pastoral elegy. Unlike a standard pastoral poem, which can address a wide range of social issues, this subgenre specifically uses pastoral imagery to address the death of a loved one and their subsequent grief. As I stated in my introduction, Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam* to mourn his friend, Arthur Hallam. The reader follows Tennyson throughout his stages of grief, starting from the raw grief that he feels when he finds out about Hallam's passing, and up until two and a half years later when he finally has shown signs of healing from the loss. Tennyson often illustrates these stages of grief through nature imagery. An early instance where he employs this tactic is in Canto II, when he has just recently found out about Hallam's death:

The seasons bring the flower,  
And bring the firstling to the flock;  
And in the dusk of thee, the clock  
Beats out the little lives of men  
(Tennyson 2.5-8)

The first two lines of this stanza are simple, factual, and bring out the beauty of life in the countryside. More specifically, the images of flowers blooming and sheepling flocking together carry a sense of comfort, since it is a reminder of nature healing after the long and harsh winter months. Tennyson then uses the frame of the seasons changing to shift into the next two lines, which introduces us to what is really troubling him: the inevitability of death. Although the world will always be able to heal itself when the seasons change, humans do not have that luxury. As a result, he has come to view the world itself as being a clock, with each season being a cruel reminder that our demise is coming closer.

One of Tennyson's most overt uses of the pastoral elegy tradition is in Canto XXI. In this part of the poem, Tennyson is singing over Hallam's grave:

I sing to him that rests below,  
And, since the grasses round me wave,  
I take the grasses of the grave,  
And make them pipes whereon to blow.

(Tennyson 21.1-4)

It is likely that Tennyson is imagining himself as a shepherd. In pastoral poetry, protagonists are often shown playing music, with the pipes being an instrument that they are commonly associated with. The music, however, is not only limited to moments of joy. Even when the shepherd is experiencing hardship, he will play a song that expresses his sorrow. With this context in mind, we can see that Tennyson is calling back to that pastoral tradition. In doing so, he is reinforcing how distraught he is over Hallam's death, not just by simply telling us how he feels, but by pushing a veil of secrecy aside so that we can be a witness to his heart-wrenching display of grief.

Tennyson is aware of the consequences of pushing the veil aside. In this same canto, he immediately goes on to provide an explanation for why he seeks comfort from the pastoral, rather than from other people:

The traveller hears me now and then,  
and sometimes harshly will he speak:  
'This fellow would make weakness weak,  
And melt the waxen hearts of men  
Another answers, 'Let him be,

He loves to make parade of pain  
That with his piping he may gain  
The praise that comes to constancy.’  
A third is wroth: ‘Is this an hour  
For private sorrow’s barren song,  
When more and more people throng  
The chairs and thrones of civil power?’  
(Tennyson 21.5-16)

Here Tennyson makes the decision to depict his critics as travelers. In itself, the decision to do so is quite interesting. To put it somewhat coldly, as I suspect that is Tennyson’s intent, a traveler does not stay anywhere for very long. They are outsiders who simply sightsee, with no connection to what they are looking at. As such, the idea of the traveler captures how Tennyson feels about his critics. Although they can see what he is going through, they do not understand it. And because they do not understand it, they condemn him.

Tennyson then takes this opportunity to address what the critics will say once they read this poem, which includes one traveler accusing him of exploiting his grief for attention, while another chastises him for wallowing in grief when there are more pressing matters at hand. These kinds of criticisms are not uncommon, especially when it comes to prolonged grief. But the most unique issue that Tennyson faces is from the first traveler, who addresses the sentimentality of *In Memoriam*. At the time that Tennyson was writing this piece, literary critics were generally dismissive of the pastoral genre: “Many critics saw it as a sort of ‘practice’ genre, one in which young poets developed their skills but which did not lead to serious writing” (Lawrence 19). The general consensus was that it was a useful genre for young poets to learn from, but that nothing

truly insightful could emerge from it. The romanticization of country life, as well as the tenderness of the subject matter, caused it to be rebuked as vulgar. In the same vein, it has received criticism for being escapist, as opposed to directly confronting social issues. These supposed qualities of the pastoral genre would not be seen as befitting of a respectable and well-established male poet. I call attention to Tennyson's gender because the pastoral form became popular with female poets in spite of the criticisms: "Many of the Restoration and the eighteenth-century female poets wrote pastorals...the pastoral is, perhaps, a 'ladylike' form, one categorically disempowered by the critical genre hierarchy" (Lawrence 20). Given the strong association that the pastoral had with womanhood during the Victorian period, Tennyson's choice to use it anyway could have been seen as him effectively emasculating himself. The traveler specifically calls him weak and implies that other men would also become weak just by associating with Tennyson. That is a strong indicator that the strong emotions that Tennyson is expressing, coupled with the form that he chose to express them in, has gone outside the sphere of masculinity.

Tennyson's acknowledgment that his masculinity will be questioned is especially fascinating, since his "excessive" sentimentality is being directed towards a man for whom he has expressed his love and devotion throughout the course of the poem. But once again, as the title of traveler suggests, they do not understand that Tennyson's queer desire is what strengthens the poem. That notion brings us to Friedman's argument about Victorian writers who realized that their sexual desires did not align with what society said they should be: "Though this revelation is, at first profoundly unsettling, aesthetes soon find themselves harnessing that sense of fear and alienation and transforming it into a liberating sense of detachment from oppressive social norms" (Friedman 2). The Victorian writers that Friedman speaks of, such as Oscar Wilde

and Vernon Lee, recognize that society would label them as being sexually deviant. While that may be understandably terrifying at first, they are eventually able to free themselves from the shackles of societal expectations, which is reflected in their work. While he is learning to process his grief, we see that Tennyson is yet another writer who attains mental liberation. Despite Tennyson having been fully aware of the criticism he was opening himself up to, he still chose to publish *In Memoriam*. Any attempt at appealing to the travelers serves no purpose, because they have already made up their minds that he should suffer in silence, if at all. Thus, he retreats to the pastoral because he knows that he will be free from their judgements. He is allowed to explore his grief in whatever way he sees fit. In fact, to briefly return to the opening lines of the canto, Tennyson uses the grass to make the pipes. While seemingly a meager detail, it is actually quite significant in the context of the travelers judging him. The pastoral does not judge him for the way that he feels; it helps him express it.

After playing his song over Hallam's grave, Tennyson begins to reflect on his relationship with Hallam. In particular, he remembers the joy that he felt when exploring nature with him:

And crying, How changed from where it ran  
Thro' lands where not a leaf was dumb;  
But all the lavish hills would hum  
The murmur of a happy Pan:  
When each by turns was guide to each,  
And Fancy light from Fancy caught,  
And thought leapt out to wed with thought  
Ere thought could wed itself with speech.  
(Tennyson 23.493-500)

In his recounting of these memories, Tennyson mentions Pan, the Greek god of shepherds. In doing so, he is explicitly elevating the imagery in this stanza from just being about nature to pastoral poetry. The effect of this choice is to emphasize Tennyson and Hallam's contentment with each other, since that is what the pastoral genre is known for. To briefly return to Gifford, the pastoral is often used as an escape from the issues that audiences may be experiencing in their lives. No matter what the cause of their emotional turmoil may be, they are comforted by the fact that they can "return" to a time where everything seems to be serene. The specific elements of the pastoral that create this effect are the landscape and the way that the speaker employs it to relate to his own life. Tennyson creates a beautiful scene here, where he remembers himself and Hallam running through colorful leaves on a magnificent hill, joyfully conversing and discovering how much they have in common. It is a stark contrast from most of the cantos up until this point, in which Tennyson reflects only on his grief, as opposed to the happier times that the two of them shared together. Although Tennyson's grief is still rather raw at this point, evidenced by him crying, revisiting the pastoral landscape seems to be therapeutic for him. His ability to reflect on these kinds of memories is a big step towards attaining closure from his loss.

Interestingly enough, though, Pan is also often associated with sexuality. *The Cult of Pan* by Philippe Borgeaud, which analyzes the origins of Pan, addresses this very subject. He notes that while Pan's sexual escapades usually involve him pursuing nymphs, he was not strictly interested in women: "The isolated haunts of Pan, a territory devoted to the hunt and to the rearing of goats and sheep, are in principle closed to women. . . . This landscape has been set aside for strictly masculine projects" (Borgeaud 77). As we saw through our analysis of "Goblin Market," the pastoral space has obviously broadened over time to include women. But classically speaking, it is a masculine sphere. Within that sphere, Pan has had sexual encounters with other

men. Tennyson's choice to reference Pan, especially when reminiscing on his relationship with Hallam, benefits him in a few ways. For one, it gives him the chance to show that masculinity is not delimited to what society thinks. The genre that they dismiss as being "ladylike" is rooted in one of the most masculine spaces that existed. Secondly, in true queer pastoral fashion, Pan's presence normalizes the queer desire between Tennyson and Hallam. Although Tennyson continues to veil the extent of his desire, he starts to become more bold after mentioning Pan. He starts to employ the use of phrases that are often associated with romance, like when he writes that he and Hallam caught each other's fancy. His language seems to be veiled just enough so that he would not suffer any legal consequences. For example, he uses the phrase "caught fancy." The basic meaning of the phrase is to describe when something is appealing (Ex: The toy train caught the little boy's fancy). On the other hand, the word is also used to describe romantic interest in someone. After this line, Tennyson moves ahead to the end of courtship, when he says that his thoughts leapt out to "wed" with Hallam's. Tennyson has actually used "wed" in other works, like in *Godiva*. The context was always quite innocent though, since he would simply refer to things that are joined together. In the context of *In Memoriam*, he could argue that he and Hallam were "joined together" through their time together as Apostles, leading to a close friendship. But realistically, especially when preceded by "fancy caught," he is describing his relationship with Hallam by using marriage imagery. The pastoral space, specifically the combination of the contented shepherds trope and the legacy of Pan, emboldens Tennyson to write about his desire for Hallam as openly as he was allowed to.

## **Conclusion**

As these poems show, the pastoral can be used as a space to explore queer desire. As we have learned from the analysis above, there are a multitude of reasons why. With regard to “Goblin Market,” we see that Laura and Lizzie have an extremely strong bond, which only evolves throughout the poem when they have their sexual awakenings. The reason why they were able to foster this sort of relationship is because of their pastoral lifestyle. Their shared property, responsibilities, and regulation of each other’s emotions created a female marriage, which was reinforced through their alienation from other people. Additionally, Rossetti uses nature imagery to depict Laura’s mental state. She begins by using idyllic representations of the pastoral, like when she compares her to a “swan” and a “lily from the beck” (Rossetti 4.2-4.3). These images depict the beauty of the countryside, and consequently, the contentment that Laura feels at the start of the poem. Rossetti then employs the use of non-pastoral imagery to depict Laura’s anguish after she eats the fruit. Instead of being a lily or a swan, both of which have easy access to water, she is now being compared to a thirsty traveler in a desert. However, when she has the sexual encounter with Lizzie, she goes through both a physical and mental rejuvenation. Rossetti then finally reverts back to the idyllic pastoral imagery, and signals Laura being cured through the use of birds chirping and lilies beginning to sprout.

As for *In Memoriam*, Tennyson explains that his townsfolk disparage him for his grief, accusing him of being embarrassingly sentimental and of exploiting his loss for attention. In response, he turns to the pastoral space so that he can properly sort out his feelings and grieve. Additionally, he is aware that the pastoral has classical roots in homoeroticism, which he then uses to broaden perceptions of masculinity and express his longing for Hallam as comfortably as he possibly could. The relationship between queer theory and the pastoral ultimately furthers both fields. Many pastoral scholars, such as Gifford and Marx, have analyzed the pastoral as

satisfying a readership that wants to return to the past. But examining the pastoral through a queer lens proves that it can also be used to explore something new. Although the queer pastoral has a long literary history, the relationship between the two fields had scarcely been considered until Nardizzi's article was published in 2016. And even then, the concept has mostly remained confined within Renaissance studies. By writing this thesis, I am taking a step forward in rectifying this issue by applying his ideas to Victorian literature.

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