

## Queer Victorian Identities in *Goblin Market* and *In Memoriam*: Uncovering the Subversive Undercurrents of the Literary Canon

'Just as the lives of lesbians and gay men are enhanced by a knowledge of their history, so too will the field of history be enriched by a reclamation of the homosexual past.'<sup>1</sup>

### Queerness/Normativity: A Generative Dichotomy

Although the historic Parliamentary Same Sex Couples Marriage Act of 2013 reflected the continuing rise in visibility of LGBT+ rights in the UK, long-established prejudices against those who identify with queer communities have persisted since its implementation. Queer people are often stigmatised, amongst other things, as being sinners; prone to infidelity; diseased; morally degenerate; perverted; and/or afraid of heterosexual intimacy. These prejudices inevitably lead to the further marginalisation of queer lives and voices within human society. A recent study, for example, found that 'only 11% of universities are able to demonstrate good or excellent inclusivity for LGBTQ students', a finding which its author concludes, highlights that 'institutionalised homophobia needs to be raised as a topic and heteronormative cultures need to be challenged within university settings'.<sup>2</sup> Prejudices against queer people however, are by no means exclusively found within higher education institutions. Rather, it is vital to remember that in the modern day, as María E. López states, it still remains 'illegal to be homosexual in almost 80 countries around the world', seven countries still impose the death penalty upon "perpetrators", and 'more than 2.7 billion people still live under regimes that condemn homosexuality with imprisonment and lashes'.<sup>3</sup> Even in more accommodating countries, queer culture is regularly still subject to censorship, as is often patent in mainstream queer art. Despite being a homage to openly homosexual public figures and a protest against the reduction in the visibility of such idols in recent years, the title of the song 'Good Guys', a 2015 single by the pop singer Mika, deliberately remains appositely covert about its queer agenda, presumably as a ludic means of further critiquing the perceived censorship of queer identities. Furthermore, the deluxe edition of the track's parent album depicts the singer in black and white pinstripe attire, evocative of a prison uniform, implying that contemporary queer identities are still subject to suppression by the heteronormative societies they exist within.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, it seems beneficial to retain an essentialist view of queer identity, acknowledging that whilst 'many factors other than sexuality itself may influence, deform, alter, or transform conceptualizations of sexuality among peoples and individuals', the rigorous demonstration of an overarching queer ancestry bears the potential to satisfactorily unite these disparate terms.<sup>5</sup> I conceive that such historicisation of societal non-normativity has radical possibilities, in particular, the potentiality to destabilise the cultural hegemony which still largely licences the marginalisation of queer identities in contemporary society. Many scholars have already begun the important work of uncovering records of queer lives throughout history, and as such, the substantial, yet often surreptitious, role which queer identities have occupied in numerous civilisations throughout human history is beginning to become more and more apparent. Resultantly, it is becoming ever more evident that while queer communities have a very real historical basis, utterly normative societies do not. Throughout this study, my contention is that the comprehensive reappraisal of numerous canonical narratives - with the goal of exposing and emphasising their historical representations of queerness - is a task still as necessary today as it was when Eve Sedgwick penned *Between Men* in 1985. This paper

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<sup>1</sup> George Chauncey, Jr., Martin Duberman, and Martha Vicinus, 'Introduction' to *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle E. Grimwood, 'What do LGBTQ students say about their experience of university in the UK?', in *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 21 (2017), 4, pp. 140, 142.

<sup>3</sup> María E. López, 'Homosexuality and homophobia in Europe' in *European Social Problems*, ed. Stuart Isaacs (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> Mika, 'Good Guys', *No Place in Heaven (Deluxe Edition)* (Universal, 0602547336255, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> John Boswell, 'Revolutions, Universals, and Sexual Categories' in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 29.

therefore attempts the queer reappropriation of two prominent canonical Victorian poems, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* and Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. As shall be demonstrated, the queer affective features of these poems express the viability of alternative modes of relation, and so convey a poignant sense of the insurrectionary elation that can be realised through affective relationships which subvert normative sexual conventions.<sup>6</sup>

At the time the texts were published, contemporary scientific discourse stigmatised women who exhibited a sex drive as nymphomaniacs,<sup>7</sup> and criminalised female-female love as 'the great damage of young girls and neuropathic women',<sup>8</sup> whilst love between men was congruently deemed to arise from either 'a pathological perversion or a moral perversity'.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly then, both poems' narratives express their queer agenda covertly, by utilising techniques of deception and secrecy, with certain qualities of each poem disguising their respective queer affective undercurrents. The specific techniques of deception and secrecy employed in each case vary greatly however; whereas in *Goblin Market* the queer agenda is relatively clandestine, principally masked by the overriding presence of the fantastical eponymous market itself, *In Memoriam's* queer agenda is effectively the central focus of the text, and is only made less palpable by an adroitly constructed tactic of deception. The subversive methods employed to express the poems' queer agendas not only helped ensure both narratives were considered suitable for publication, but also provided an inconspicuous means for them to express sexually dissident views within their contemporary society once they had been issued.

Accordingly, it is patently understandable that *Goblin Market* and *In Memoriam*, along with many other historical texts, opted to utilise secretive methods of expressing queer identities and desires, given that there is, and always has been, a widespread propensity in Western society to silence any voices which dissent with the established hegemonic socio-normative ideologies. One important way in which such sociocultural ideologies function to marginalise queer identities, Eva Illouz suggests, is to obscure 'men's and especially women's gender identity', to the extent that this identity becomes purely 'a sexual identity: that is, [...] a set of self-consciously manipulated bodily, linguistic, and sartorial codes geared to elicit sexual desire in another'.<sup>10</sup> Queer Theory must therefore identify, and find historical precedent for, terms other than identity through which queerness can be defined.

Although they are fundamentally non-normative, expressions of queerness are nonetheless conditioned by social forces. Referring back to my opening point, it seems evident that a heteronormative culture extant for centuries cannot be obliged to undergo cessation by means of constitution, however emancipatory the Parliamentary Same Sex Couples Marriage Act may have been; such an abiding cultural ideology is far too potent. Louis Althusser defines an ideology as a collective normative 'system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group', which specifically promotes 'not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live'.<sup>11</sup> Although it was penned in 1970, Althusser's delineation of ideology is still incredibly pertinent today. I draw attention to a report by the United Kingdom Home Office recording a 29 percent increase in offences against individuals' race, sexuality, gender, disability and religion between 2016 and 2017, 'thought to reflect [...] a genuine rise in hate crime around the time of the EU referendum', the widespread vitriolic

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<sup>6</sup> Although this study focuses on recovering the queer affect displayed in prominent texts by each of these two writers, it is not within its remit to determine whether or not Tennyson and Rossetti had homosexual relationships. To do so would be a task for a historian, rather than a literary theorist.

<sup>7</sup> Gustave Bouchereau, 'Nymphomania', in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, eds. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> Bouchereau, 'Nymphomania', p. 296.

<sup>9</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, 'Psychopathia Sexualis with Especial Reference to Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study' in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, eds. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 302.

<sup>10</sup> Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, ed. Fredric Jameson, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 107, 111.

political rhetoric of the period seeming to have ideologically licensed this adverse trend.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, since any ideology produces a drastic dissimilitude between the subject's real and imagined conditions of existence, many modern labels used to describe sexuality themselves are just as fantastic a fabrication of identity as the heteronormative culture they seek to elide is, still asking the subject to subscribe to and be conditioned by the distinction of 'either/or - or a "bisexual" combination' of two predefined sexual categories.<sup>13</sup> Queerness however, can be realised as a broader concept, one which encompasses a wide range of LGBT+ individuals and their non-normative experiences, and perhaps offers a valuable alternative to the tyranny inherent in designating alternative identities using preordained categories. Queerness it can thus be reasoned, should come to be a concept which is affect- rather than identity- based.

Applying Althusser's notion of ideology within a more contemporary, and specifically queer context, Berlant and Warner state that 'Heterosexual culture achieves much of its metacultural intelligibility through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy', and hence, it is necessary for queer discourse to challenge heteronormative ideologies by scrutinising the erroneous construction of affect.<sup>14</sup> As 'Ideologies and institutions of intimacy are increasingly offered as a vision of the good life [...] away from the confusing and unsettling distractions and contradictions of capitalism and politics', queer critique must re-emphasise the existence of queer modes of affect, which hold the potential to disrupt such ideological notions.<sup>15</sup> Since heteronormativity 'is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; [...] is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life', heteronormative ideologies dominate social thought, and 'Queer culture, by contrast, has almost no institutional matrix for its counterintimacies'.<sup>16</sup> Thus by further historicising queerness through the institutional matrix of the literary canon, it can be proven that queer modes have long existed as subcultures within, and as viable alternatives to, normative cultures. If queer identities can never comprise absolute liberation from socionormative conditions, as 'the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself', they are nevertheless expressions of the self which are of significant utility to their proponents, collaboratively amounting to the basis of a potent countercultural movement.<sup>17</sup>

In an analysis derived from contemporary accounts of nineteenth century boarding-school relationships between women, Martha Vicinus observes that:

After a [woman] had received some sign from her [crush] that feelings might be reciprocated, moments of greater intimacy were sought, though not necessarily in private, for secrecy could be created in the public domain of the school. The two lovers found means of speaking silently to each other, of sharing words and thoughts that could not be, and would not be, talked about in the general strategy sessions among peers. The secret sharing of a private world in a public place became a major source of pleasure; it affirmed the love<sup>18</sup>

I contend that the above account exemplifies the profound capability of queer counterculture to, if not provide a means of absolute escape from, successfully subvert antagonistic cultural

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<sup>12</sup> Aoife O'Neill, 'Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2016/17', 2017, <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf)>, p. 1. [accessed 19 January 2018]

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of HeteroSEXUALITY* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', in *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (1998), 2, p. 553.

<sup>15</sup> Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public', p. 553.

<sup>16</sup> Berlant and Warner, 'Sex in Public', pp. 554, 562.

<sup>17</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, eds. Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Martha Vicinus, 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding School Friendships, 1870-1920' in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, eds. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 218.

paradigms through the axis of affect. By these women finding an anti-language of 'speaking silently' within an otherwise 'public place', the cultural norms of that location were subverted, allowing an otherwise concealed queer counterculture to momentarily intrude upon the public sphere, and resulting in a 'source of pleasure' born of affect.<sup>19</sup> By collective adoption, queerness is able to metamorphose from a "marginal" to a potent alternative identity, the reinforcement of its own ideology steadily rendering the formerly dominant heteronormative ideologies less authoritative. Queerness, like any serviceable counterculture then, exposes the hypocrisies of normative culture, by reading it back upon itself. For example, Rees notes that even medical discourse is normative, as many of the supposedly essential gendered characteristics which sex reassignment surgery attempts to cure, such as 'length of hair', are merely 'social constructs' of either maleness or femininity.<sup>20</sup> As queer countercultures offer a momentous source of cognitive enfranchisement amidst an often hostile climate of homophobia, and given that there remains an indissociable 'link between the apparently dissimilar processes of desire and identification',<sup>21</sup> it is unsurprising that since the latter half of the twentieth century, 'the development of a powerful movement publicly and actively affirming a gay and lesbian "identity." [...] has freed thousands of women and men from a deep, painful, socially induced sense of inferiority and shame.'<sup>22</sup>

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* however, Lee Edelman convincingly argues that queerness can never truly constitute a liberative form of identity due to the Symbolic nature of social reality. Instead, he advocates for negative affect, construing this as a force which holds the power to negate conservative ideologies by exposing the fixity of a future lived under their thrall:

For just as compassion allows no rhetorical ground outside its logic, no place to stand beyond its enforced Imaginary identifications [...] compassion is always conservative [...] so irony's negativity calls forth compassion to negate it and thereby marks compassion and all the components of desire, its defining identifications as well as the fantasies that sustain them, with the negativity of the very drive against which they claim to defend.<sup>23</sup>

For Edelman, although positive affect masquerades as a solution to queer persecution, it is actually only a socionormative analeptic for queer disenfranchisement, a mode of existence which implicitly affirms, and is thus powerless to prevent the same socionormative conditions being perpetually reproduced throughout history. Instead, he proposes that those who identify as queer must work to oppose the reproductive futurism which normative culture ideologically promotes, by embracing the opposition queerness figures to the Image of the Child via the espousal of negative affect (or queer negativity).

The near absolute cultural hegemony that reproductive futurism exerts in contemporary societies is demonstrable - to give merely one example for the sake of brevity - through 'Dad Behavior', a recent episode of *The Simpsons*. In a radical subversion of the show's regular opening titles sequence, the preface to the episode shows the various members of The Simpson family failing to carry out the implausible activities they usually perform unproblematically within the familiar opening footage, with almost exclusively fatal consequences. After Maggie drives the car she and her mother are sat in into a lake, Marge's corpse soon floats to the surface, yet although it seems inevitable that she too must have died, Maggie's corpse is pointedly not depicted. For the episode to kill Maggie, would be for the episode to kill the Image of the Child, and thus expose the illusory nature of a social order which perpetually defers the achievement of an Imaginary wholeness onto its ensuing generations. Accordingly, the dismal portrayal of Marge's corpse figures as an uncompromising admonition of her ineptitude in having (somehow) left her child unsupervised in the front seat of her car, endangering the safety of the Image of the Child which forms the Symbolic guarantee of reproductive futurism. Later in the episode, upon realising he isn't the father of a fellow resident

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Emma, L. E. Rees, *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 245.

<sup>21</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Katz, *The Invention of HeteroSEXUALITY*, p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, p. 89.

of his retirement home's unborn child, Abraham Simpson demonstrates queer negativity in practice when he remarks with glee that 'not having kids keeps you young'.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the immense cultural prevalence of cultural ideologies which espouse reproductive futurism aptly proves the continuing utility of Edelman's philosophy to the field of Queer Theory. Nevertheless, whilst Edelman attempts to relocate queerness as an identity outside of the fantasies of normative culture altogether, his conception of queerness still necessarily remains positioned in opposition to ordinary culture, figuring an indissoluble dichotomy between queerness and straightness, defined by whether they (literally) conceive the futurity of life or not. Where Edelman therefore proficiently utilises an essentialist conception of queerness to suggest a direction by which the queer future may be negotiated, my analysis is more disposed to attempt the further exposure of the queer past. Whilst it may ostensibly seem problematic to apply modern conceptions of queerness to Victorian texts, given that social conceptions of sexuality have undergone massive alterations in the intervening time, this study will embrace an awareness of queerness as being detectable as a variously expressed, yet ultimately contiguous, force throughout recorded human history.

In contrast to Edelman's position, Tyler Bradway contends that queer negativity is only one method of queer existence, and that positive affect can be just as useful to queer movements. He therefore argues that discourse on the importance of negative modes of affect has 'tended to eclipse other forces of queerness', and that there is a need for queer theorists to establish a queer affective archive, a textual record that 'positive affects can encode desires for queer social relations in historical moments when those relations are under attack'.<sup>25</sup> He holds that queer affect is actualised through the 'axis of affect — the body's immanent openness to qualitative change', and can be figured as a 'pre-ideological sensual domain' that exists on the margins of normative culture with forceful countercultural potential.<sup>26</sup> From this perspective, queer affect, however ephemerally, is held to be able to prefigure and radically exceed the purview of ideology altogether. Hence, Bradway conceives that queerness itself is not defined by the performance of erotic acts as such, but instead by the generation of queer affect. His conception of queerness thus forestalls the popular contention that earlier cultures didn't have the same apprehension of sexuality as modern societies and thus weren't queer, since his politics of queer affect is unquestionably demonstrable across history.

Consequently this analysis will attempt to determine the locations of affect in the two aforementioned canonical Victorian texts *Goblin Market* and *In Memoriam*, in order to reclaim their politics of queer affect. Undoubtedly, a number of notable discourses by queer theorists have already begun the task of queering the canon, so it should be emphasised that the work of this study is in many ways a continuation rather than an unprecedented intervention.<sup>27</sup> However as has been stated, both texts hold the potential to advance the comprehensive queer affective archive suggested by Bradway, and thus this study forms a contribution towards a prevalent mode of discourse in the field of Queer Theory.

### ***In Memoriam***

Though Alan Sinfield persuasively argues that *In Memoriam* (1850) is composed of 'complex structures of language' in a way that ensures 'careless reading is likely to provide the least satisfactory approach' to its textual meaning, in truth the structural complexity of Tennyson's poem does not distract from its manifest queer agenda whatsoever, as even a surface reading reveals.<sup>28</sup> As its title suggests, *In Memoriam A.H.H.* is a solemn elegy to Tennyson's male companion Arthur Henry Hallam, and Tennyson's uttermost anguish at the loss of his friend is

<sup>24</sup> Steven Dean Moore, dir., *The Simpsons*, S28:8 - 'Dad Behavior' (Fox, 2016)

<sup>25</sup> Tyler Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), vi, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature*, pp. 153, 154.

<sup>27</sup> Alongside Bradway's *Queer Experimental Literature*, Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens; Shakesqueer* (edited by Madhavi Menon); Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity*; and most recently, Maxime Foerster's *The Politics of Love* are all major examples of queer critical readings of canonical texts.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Sinfield, 'Diction: Simple Words and Complex Meanings', in *In Memoriam*, ed. Erik Gray (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 161.

unmistakable throughout. Bereft that he can be Hallam's 'mate no more', Tennyson's autobiographical speaker finds himself torturously afflicted by 'An inner trouble' which 'makes [him] cold'.<sup>29</sup> As when Hallam is earlier evoked as 'the comrade of [his] choice', the language of the poem not only frequently exhibits homosexual undertones, but moreover conveys a forceful sense of the speaker's utter despondency at the nature of his bereavement.<sup>30</sup>

Hallam being described as 'Dear as the mother to the son' and 'more than my brothers are to me' implies that he and the persona had a very close relationship, in which each of them was irreplaceable in the eyes of the other, and thus the persona of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* exhibits a queer choice of affect object in his desire for Hallam.<sup>31</sup> His idiosyncratic affective choice accordingly emphasises that 'object choices are not equivalent', with some forms of desire bearing the potential to take the individual 'beyond the horizon of intimacy', and towards the phenomenological attainment of euphoric emotions.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the passionate terms Tennyson uses to describe his late relationship with Hallam are frequently homoerotic, particularly when the speaker figures himself in a female and submissive role in relation to Hallam, as 'some poor girl whose heart is set' on a lover 'whose rank exceeds her own', and must therefore remain deferential to her partner.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, when the speaker presents himself as the 'widow'd' spouse of Hallam, he figures the two of them in familial terms.<sup>34</sup> It is intriguing then, that Mary Jean Corbett argues it is actually 'normative forms of Victorian familialism and conjugality'<sup>35</sup> which allow the expression of the persona's desire in the poem, and that Tennyson's affective bond with Hallam is the result of them being brothers-in-law.<sup>36</sup> Although Corbett states that it was a familial norm in the Victorian period to treat 'a sibling's spouse [as] one's own sibling' or as an even more intimate relation, such behaviour would be decidedly queer by modern standards.<sup>37</sup> Notably then, the ideologies that condition contemporary affect choices, are actually more restrictive, and far more prohibitively categorised, than they were in the past. Furthermore, Chris White asserts that in texts from the Victorian period which depict affect between males, 'there is a language for love between men which appears in the form of intense, emotional friendship that can fulfil the individual,' and I contend that it is in this manner that Tennyson's persona figures his desire for Hallam.<sup>38</sup> Since the concept of "homosexuality" did not exist in the period in which the poem was written, it is of particular note that Tennyson is nevertheless able to recognise and promote his affect as a form of emotional liberation. Precisely because his affect is unconditioned by the arbitrary and often stultifying label of "homosexual", Tennyson's persona is granted a greater range of social modes of expression for his desire.

Though select turns of phrase in the poem are clearly highly suggestive, better confirmation of the overt homosexual agenda in the text comes when Tennyson's persona 'locates his devotion to Hallam with Shakespearean love' in section LXI, where as Jeff Nunokawa states, 'he identifies his desire with a standard Victorian figure for the male

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. Erik Gray (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), canto XLI. Lines 20, 18, 19.

<sup>30</sup> *In Memoriam*, XIII. 9.

<sup>31</sup> *In Memoriam*, IX. 19, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *In Memoriam*, LX. 3, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *In Memoriam*, IX. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Jean Corbett, 'No Second Friend?: Perpetual Maidenhood and Second Marriage in *In Memoriam* and "The Conjugal Angel"', in *ELH*, 81 (2014), 1, p. 301.

<sup>36</sup> Through Hallam's engagement to Emilia Tennyson.

<sup>37</sup> Corbett, 'No Second Friend?', p. 301.

<sup>38</sup> Chris White, ed. *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 236.

homoerotic'.<sup>39</sup> The signifier of homosexual desire identified by Nunokawa is Tennyson's reference to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, which were also addressed to and extolled the virtues of a male friend. This intertextual signification therefore implies that Shakespeare's elegant sonnets themselves cannot express 'love [for Hallam] more' than Tennyson's persona himself can, given the subjectively experienced affective union the two of them had shared.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the ABBA rhyme scheme of the poem is revealing in itself, its intrinsic circularity - created by the return of the fourth line to the rhyme of the first, after an ephemeral development - mirrors the speaker's state of mind, by emulating the recurrence of grief in the process of mourning. As is further demonstrated in the poem, the speaker's mentality is largely characterised by an overpowering inability to experience anything related to life; his description of the 'long unlovely street' is an ominous portent of future time, days of grief and emotional numbness yet to come.<sup>41</sup> Though he can marginally experience the external world, he notices only the 'drizzling rain' and the 'bald street' and ascribes it another 'blank day', one which contains no saving graces without Hallam alive to share it with him.<sup>42</sup> Although he is able to perceive his surroundings, the speaker still feels irrevocably separated from them:

He is not here; but far away  
The noise of life begins again,<sup>43</sup>

He remains as detached from reengagement with his physical environment as he is from Hallam himself. The enjambment ending the first line allows 'but far away' to function doubly; not only with the line it lies in, but also by becoming a component of the following line too, this linkage firmly situating the speaker's present lethargy and his grief for Hallam in inexorable union. Though 'He wishes not to be in pain, [...] it is his pain which is', dreadfully, now the only 'living witness to his love', the only feeling for Hallam he has left to hold onto.<sup>44</sup>

As demonstrated, the early part of the poem's queer agenda is, if a secret at all, a poorly rendered secret at best. Henceforth, the latter part of the poem employs an explicit technique of deception to suggest that the speaker's homosexual passion has been usurped, that the speaker has outgrown the species of desire he displayed earlier. While Nunokawa is correct to determine that 'the place in *In Memoriam* where the homoerotic is extinguished, the place where Tennyson's love for Hallam is matured [...] permanently arrested at the stage of schoolboy love' occurs in section LXXXI - when 'Death declares that through its intervention, Tennyson's devotion to Hallam was fully ripened' - he is mistaken in his conclusion that the subsequent sections of the poem actively repudiate the earlier queer agenda entirely.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, the section does function as a 'funeral [...] for [Tennyson's] own puerile homoerotic desire', but crucially it only does so deceptively.<sup>46</sup> By renouncing the instances of homoerotic desire in the poem as merely the 'Confusions of a wasted youth', Tennyson ensures his poem ostensibly appears sufficiently heteronormative, presumably in order to achieve its publication.<sup>47</sup> It is clear however that the potent homosexual love already represented in the poem cannot simply be outgrown as if it were a passing teenage fad, and correspondingly Tennyson's love for Hallam - his queer affect - continues to be detectable, though to a greatly lessened extent, far further into the poem. As is evident in his continued lament at the wasted hopes he had of 'some strong bond which [was] to be' with Hallam, the speaker's earlier desire for his companion has not diminished whatsoever, as the poem's continuance itself reaffirms.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jeff Nunokawa, 'In Memoriam and the Extinction of the Homosexual', in *In Memoriam*, ed. Erik Gray (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> *In Memoriam*, LXI. 12

<sup>41</sup> *In Memoriam*, VII. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *In Memoriam*, VII. 11, 12, Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *In Memoriam*, VII. 9 - 10.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Ricks, 'In Memoriam, 1850', in *In Memoriam*, ed. Erik Gray (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), p. 185.

<sup>45</sup> Nunokawa, 'Extinction of the Homosexual', p. 216.

<sup>46</sup> Nunokawa, 'Extinction of the Homosexual', p. 218.

<sup>47</sup> *In Memoriam*, [Prologue]. 42.

<sup>48</sup> *In Memoriam*, CXVI. 16.

The notion of *Knabenliebe*, paederasty, or "greek love" bears relevance here. This term, used frequently in the Victorian period to describe and sanction male-male sexual relationships, is premised on the notions that such 'relationships, once begun, never extend beyond the youth of the junior partner' and that 'the younger partner does not share in his older lover's sexual desire but, [...] surrenders out of a mixed feeling of gratitude, esteem, and affection'.<sup>49</sup> As Hallam was two years Tennyson's elder, it would be expected that if their relationship was merely that of Greek love, that Tennyson would have grown out of his feelings of romantic affect for Hallam in adulthood, and even that he should never have had such feelings in the first instance. Therefore, by emphasising that his love for Hallam continues years after his lover's death, Tennyson specifically queers common notions of the time that such male-male relationships were a whim of adolescence, surrendered at the age of adulthood, and hints towards a far more expansive and less rigidly defined conception of queer sexuality and love. His love is not normatively transgressive, but rather excessively transgressive, in a manner that also consequently problematises the foundation of many contemporary heteronormative prejudices against "homosexuals". The great deception of *In Memoriam* thus works to render its text orthodox, or heteronarrative, and to normalise its persona's sexual identity, a subversion which appears less than convincing when closely examined.

### **Goblin Market**

Conversely, Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1862) is more broadly taciturn in expressing its queer agenda, the queer identities of its personae resembling only a constituent element of the text, rather than its central focus. Like the term homosexual in Tennyson's time, the term lesbian was not in common usage when Rossetti wrote *Goblin Market*, however there are documented accounts which record the existence of female-female affect even earlier in history than the time at which she wrote the poem. For example, Anne Lister's journals for the period 1817-26 [...] record that she had sexual affairs with a number of women including Isabella Norcliffe, Anne Belcombe, Mariana Belcombe, Maria Barlow, Madame de Rosny and Ann Walker'.<sup>50</sup> Lister nonetheless had to remain secretive about her queer desires, regularly having to deny 'any knowledge of sexual activity between women', just as Tennyson and Rossetti made their poems' queer agendas clandestine.<sup>51</sup>

In Lister and Rossetti's time, the practice of female-female relationships was referred to by the term sapphism, but whilst this nomenclature suggests an alternate form of sexuality to modern female-female union, the affective desire which is signified by the phrases "sapphism" and "lesbianism" is a common one. Both terms construe female-female desire as being transgressional, figure the euphoria born of the pursuit of individual sexual desires as being of superlative importance to politically inscribed social conventions, and thus work to overturn such conventions. Likewise, Bernadette J. Brooten identifies a number of terms such as *hetairistria* (roughly translated as 'companion') which predate the term lesbian, and which were used to refer to women who had sexual relations with other women in ancient Greek society, which she concludes 'demonstrates the existence of a cultural category of homoerotic women (and not just of female homoerotic acts)'.<sup>52</sup> Queer affect then, has a firm precedent in history, yet hegemonic ideologies such as heteronormativity and homonormativity work to obscure these queer histories. This once more proves just how necessary it is to investigate the central cultural artefacts of our human past in addition to our present, in order to continue to foreground the existence of these historical queer identities.

Regardless of the exact term by which female-female relationships are signified, as Adrienne Rich states, there is actually an increased need to be secretive for Rossetti in attempting to escape censorship than there was for Tennyson, as 'in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic

<sup>49</sup> David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 55.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Colclough, "Do you not know the quotation?": Reading Anne Lister, Anne Lister Reading', in *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century*, eds. John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Colclough, 'Do you not know the quotation?', p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 4, 337.

itself'.<sup>53</sup> Thus *Goblin Market* being secretive about its queer agenda is not merely a method of escaping censorship, but also of expressing its agenda in a way that is free of linguistic enslavement to patriarchy. By the text being secretively rather than openly queer, it escapes the patriarchal assumptions and prejudices it would usually face, and accordingly the secretive nature of the text becomes a queer language in itself, which therefore affords a freedom of queer expression. Most noticeably perhaps, the text's ostensible form as a children's poem forms an important factor in this secretive design, its opening establishing a tone of childishness through its nursery rhyme qualities; as is exemplified by the simplistic language and rhythm of the calls of 'Come buy, come buy' which form a repetitive refrain at the outset.<sup>54</sup> The main content of the poem however, engages with far more mature themes than this early sample taken alone would suggest.

Interestingly, the poem's title is itself a means of queer secrecy, its exclusive fixation on the goblins thematically marginalising the importance of the sisters' relationship within the overall text, even though they are its central protagonists.<sup>55</sup> In their relation toward each other, Laura and Lizzie appear to be extraordinarily intimate for sisters, 'Crouching close together' in 'Among the brookside rushes', and spending copious amounts of time together 'Evening by evening'.<sup>56</sup> Descriptions of 'clasping arms and cautioning lips [...] tingling cheeks and finger tips' convey that there is a definite sensuality inherent in their intimacy, an impression further evoked by the natural imagery used to describe them 'Folded in each other's wings', lying in loving embrace in the bed they share.<sup>57</sup> Laura and Lizzie's bodies, when joined in female-female union like this, are open to a plurality of interpretations, being variously described as being 'Like two blossoms on one stem', 'Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow' and 'Like two wands of ivory'.<sup>58</sup> The configuration of their conjoined bodies is hence shown to be queer, and resistant to definition in simplistic terms, as it evades and exceeds any attempt at discerning and hence colonising its meaning. Intriguingly, although Edelman asserts that any queer identity 'is always oppositionally defined',<sup>59</sup> when lying 'Golden head by golden head'<sup>60</sup> Laura and Lizzie are, in praxis, palpably indistinguishable, each of their identities being defined by its instinctive role as the corresponding half of the other's.

Given this wealth of indicative evidence, it seems reasonable to question whether the purported sister-sister relationship between the two women is not in fact another method of deception. Rich suggests the use of the term '*lesbian continuum*' to include a range [...] of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman', and by the application of this redefinition to the text it becomes unnecessary to see evidence of direct sexual activity in the sisters' close bond in order to confidently assert it to lie within this continuum of female-female affect, and thus to be fundamentally queer in character.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, although it is imperative to read, through the sisters' 'sharing of a rich inner life[,] breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited [...] definitions of "lesbianism."', it is equally noteworthy that it is their queer identities themselves which are threatened within the text.<sup>62</sup>

Specifically, the sisters' "lesbian" existence in *Goblin Market* is one which is problematised by its interaction with the goblins and the heterosexual culture they embody. The goblins, explicitly specified to be 'little men' and 'brothers', figure as the representatives of male desire in the text, and though 'Their [heterosexual] offers should not charm' the lesbian sisters, they most undoubtedly do.<sup>63</sup> As Luce Irigaray suggests, female-female 'desire [...] may be

<sup>53</sup> Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), p. 650.

<sup>54</sup> Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol. E: The Victorian Age*, ed. Julia Reidhead (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012), line. 4; also, lines 19, 31.

<sup>55</sup> I refer to Laura and Lizzie as sisters throughout this paper both for ease of reference, and because the text refers to them as such.

<sup>56</sup> *Goblin Market*, 36, 33, 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Goblin Market*, 38 - 39, 186

<sup>58</sup> *Goblin Market*, 188 - 190.

<sup>59</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Goblin Market*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', p. 648.

<sup>62</sup> Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', pp. 648 - 649.

<sup>63</sup> *Goblin Market*, 55, 65.

recovered only in secret, in hiding', and the goblins' interference in the sisters' interdependent relationship represents a destruction of this necessary privacy.<sup>64</sup> Laura's vulnerability is further emphasised by the description of her being 'Like a vessel at the launch/When its last restraint is gone', as she becomes transfixed by a male desire, alien to her, which she cannot begin to comprehend.<sup>65</sup> Although the sisters are capable of empowering and enriching each other's lives when they are 'Locked together in one nest' in private spaces, the degree to which patriarchal culture refutes queer relationships is patent whenever they are elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> Outside their home, whilst the sisters endeavour to remain 'Covered close lest they should look' at their tempters, the goblins' song nonetheless proves too compelling to resist.<sup>67</sup> Evidently merely for them to enter a public place is to surrender their queer mode of affect by opening themselves to the influence of the antagonistic male desire the goblins stand as a metonym for.

As the goblins' hostile presence thereby demonstrates, there remains 'the competition of heterosexual compulsion for women's attention' even for those whose sexual desires are located on the "lesbian" continuum.<sup>68</sup> Though the cautionary tale of Jeanie's tragic fate forewarns them that a woman has already 'dwindled and gr[own] grey' and died after interacting with the goblins, the sisters are nevertheless drawn to their fruit and calls, '[Laura's] mouth water[ing] still' at their alien offerings despite herself.<sup>69</sup> While the goblins' 'grapes are so luscious' and outwardly radiant - purportedly ideal to satisfy Laura's desire - their intake turns her 'To swift decay and burn' before long, just as compulsory heterosexual culture is fundamentally unnatural and often even harmful to people with variant sexual desires.<sup>70</sup> There is evidently a necessity for female-female relationships and desire to survive, if they are to at all, through the 'rejection of [this otherwise] compulsory way of life'.<sup>71</sup>

In a reading which draws an interesting parallel to my own queer interpretation of the associations between the sisters and the goblins, Michael Tosin Gbogi makes a convincing argument that the presence of the goblins within the poem provides a means by which it 'tackles capitalism'.<sup>72</sup> He asserts that the 'sexist imagery of the market-place [...] a place where men are hyper-active sellers', provokes a dichotomic relationship between the market and the sisters' home, the latter of which provides them with a refuge from androcentric culture.<sup>73</sup> Despite the fact that my reading principally differs by construing the goblins' agenda as heteronormative rather than androcentric, I believe Gbogi is mistaken in his claim that the 'final picture Rossetti paints of the patriarchal market is one of total destruction where no root or stone or shoot of (goblin) men's oppression remains' and thus that the poem is a 'radical vision of a complete annihilation of patriarchal oppression'.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the resolution of the poem is far less simplistic than Gbogi's reading would suggest.

Importantly then, at the end of *Goblin Market*, the goblins are only marginally deposed, 'vanished', presumably to promulgate the compulsory heterosexual culture they represent elsewhere, and though no husbands are visible, 'both [sisters have become] wives' - presumably to men - and mothers.<sup>75</sup> Although it is manifestly disconcerting that the sisters have seemingly surrendered their queer identities, the poem's dénouement adroitly emphasises the extent to which 'pregnancy, childbirth and parenting are unavoidable side effects of' patriarchal societies, and the unremitting insuperability of heteronormative ideologies.<sup>76</sup> It is therefore rather poignant that even after submitting to heterosexual union, Laura nonetheless fondly

<sup>64</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One' in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, (trans.) Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Goblin Market*, 85 - 86.

<sup>66</sup> *Goblin Market*, 198.

<sup>67</sup> *Goblin Market*, 51.

<sup>68</sup> Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', p. 656.

<sup>69</sup> *Goblin Market*, 156, 166.

<sup>70</sup> *Goblin Market*, 61, 279.

<sup>71</sup> Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', p. 649.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Tosin Gbogi, 'Refiguring the subversive in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"', in *Neohelicon*, 41 (2014), 2, p. 510.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Gbogi, 'Refiguring the subversive', p. 511.

<sup>75</sup> *Goblin Market*, 446, 544.

<sup>76</sup> Louisa Yates, 'The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Queer Families' in *The Figure of the Child in Neo-Victorian Families: Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*, eds. Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), p. 114.

recalls 'Those pleasant days long gone', which have become locked away in 'not-returning time'.<sup>77</sup> Now merely a memory, the sisters' generative affect has become locked away in a past as irretrievable as it is queer.

## Conclusion

And yet, as has been the contention of this study, through the production of queer re-readings of canonical texts, queer affect in the past can be rescued, enabled, and come to be affective anew. *Goblin Market* concludes with the sisters' close bond having been surrendered in the pursuit of reproductive futurity, a paradigm shift ratified by two heteronormative marriages. Equally, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* only succeeds in espousing its queer agenda by a debasing self-ridicule of its earlier sections and its persona's queer identity, culminating in a heterosexual marriage. Thus, although a level of secrecy and deception apropos their queer agendas secured the possibility of their publication within a culture of compulsory heterosexuality, the queer agendas of both texts ultimately remain partially confined by the limitations entailed by their adherence to those same social strictures.

By continuing to produce new queer readings of such responsive canonical texts however, we can succeed in (re)enabling their radical potential in a truly incendiary fashion. This study has attempted to form a contribution towards the wider ongoing historicisation of queer countercultures, a contribution which in turn provokes a number of corollary concerns. In addition to there being a need to reappraise the queer capacity of other works by Tennyson and Rossetti, I propose that there is also a need to investigate the prospective queerness of other mid-Victorian period texts contiguous to the two this study has focused on.

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<sup>77</sup> *Goblin Market*, 550, 551.

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