

# A look at despair: "mariana in the south" compared to "mariana"

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Poets often revise and re-revise their work, as it can be difficult to fully express the emotions they want to invoke in the reader. Just a change of one word can change the entire meaning of a line, and poetry's usual brevity requires every single word to be the perfect choice. Tennyson wrote two versions of his "Mariana," the second being very different. Both are about a woman named Mariana who has been deserted by her lover and left to be forever alone in their country home. Upon close inspection, one can see clearly why he made the decisions to change the things he did. The first version, "Mariana in the South" has a more hopeful tone: it has movement from a deeper depression to moments of hope. The second, simply titled "Mariana," has no sense of hope whatsoever. The poems are so different, in fact, that it becomes evident that he wasn't satisfied with the expression of his first attempt, and wanted to try again to evoke that sense of complete desperation. Tennyson changed the actual shape of the poem, its diction, and most importantly his imagery, to create a much stronger sense of despair in the second version. The shape of the poem, which would seem to be a tiny and insignificant detail, shapes the poem's meaning in a very significant way. In the first version of the poem, certain lines of each stanza are indented in such a way as to create a shape that resembles a wave. It alternates between indented and unindented lines, swelling out at the refrain into what might look like the crest of the wave. In the second version of the poem, each stanza also alternates between indented and unindented lines, but the seventh and eighth lines of each stanza reverse the pattern. This breaking of the pattern helps to visually create a much less smooth feeling, and appears to be broken in a way. This brokenness becomes significant

because Mariana herself, in her heartache over the loss of her lover, is in a sense broken. The diction of the poem is better thought out in the second version, to help create that sense of complete desperation Mariana is experiencing. A couple of instances of awkward or ineffective diction occur in "Mariana in the South." One such instance refers to Mariana's singing as a "carol" (13). The word "carol" appears to be chosen simply because its two syllables make the iambic tetrameter of the line work properly, but is completely detrimental to the emotion Tennyson intends to evoke. The connotations of the word actually imply joy, and especially refer to a song about Christmas- a time of love and peace. Of course, Mariana is experiencing neither joy, nor love, nor peace. The diction of the second edition of the poem appears to be much more clearly thought out. Many words actually have two meanings, both of which are significant to the work. When evening comes, Tennyson writes, "thickest dark did trance the sky," (18). The footnote tells us that the word "trance" means cross, as in "thickest dark did [cross] the sky," but to trance can also mean to bewitch, something that would have sinister connotations for the reader. Similarly, he also writes that Mariana "glanced athwart the glooming flats" (20). "Athwart" means across in this line, but can also mean perverse or wrong, just as Mariana's world seems somehow wrong without her lover's presence. This word is also used in line 77. In the last stanza of the poem, Tennyson writes that the sun is "sloping toward his western bower" (78). Of course, most people know that the sun sets in the west. Tennyson's purpose is not to remind the reader of the sun's setting location, but to suggest the finality that comes with the setting of the sun. As the setting of the sun represents

the end of the day, so the west comes to symbolize an ending or a finality. So the use of the word "western" serves to imply the finality of happiness that comes with the loss of the lover for Mariana. Perhaps most important in the category of diction changes is the change the poet made to the refrain of the poem, as it is repeated several times and central to the meaning. In the first version, the refrain ends with, "To live forgotten, and love forlorn." In the second version, it ends with, "I would that I were dead." While both are indeed pitiful, the first at least focuses on life. Although she isn't thrilled with the prospect, Mariana thinks of her future life in some way. On the other hand, the second version focuses only on death. The hopelessness of the situation is so great in this version that Mariana wants to die. Imagery is so prevalent in these poems, and so significant, that it is the most important element. So many image patterns are used (and almost all of them are changed) that imagery must be the central topic of discussion in the changes made between the earlier and later versions of "Mariana." Religious imagery is perhaps the most drastic example. "Mariana in the South" is simply filled with Christian religious imagery. The refrain consists of complaints made to the Virgin Mary, Mariana prays to Mary at times for help with combating her depression, and Heaven is referred to in the last stanza. In "Mariana," however, all of that religiosity is gone, except for a small, "Oh God, that I were dead!" (82) in the last stanza. This change contributes immensely to the lack of hope for Mariana. Religion gives many followers a sense of hope through prayer and through the assurance of happiness in the afterlife. By removing the thought of religion, Tennyson removes a source of hope for Mariana. Another image pattern missing from the second version consists of

the images that constantly portray Mariana as beautiful. Throughout "Mariana in the South," she is referred to as simply breathtaking. He writes, "She, as her carol sadder grew, / From brow and bosom slowly down / Thro' rosy taper fingers drew / Her streaming curls of deepest brown / To left and right, and made appear, / Still-lighted in a secret shine, / Her melancholy eyes divine" (13-19). He later refers to "the clear perfection of her face" (32). These descriptions at best serve no purpose to the meaning of the poem, and at worst are detrimental. Tennyson must have realized their uselessness, and so did not include any references to Mariana's beauty in the second version of the work. A major addition to the poem's imagery comes in the form of destruction images. The first version makes no references to the condition of the house and surroundings as in any way unkempt. In the second version, however, the house and the area around it are described as completely decrepit. The first stanza reads: "With blackest moss the flower-plots / Were thickly crusted, one and all; / The rusted nails fell from the knots / That held the pear to the gable wall. / The broken sheds looked sad and strange: / Unlifted was the clinking latch; / Weeded and worn the ancient thatch / Upon the lonely moated grange." (1-12). The area surrounding the house is "glooming" (20), the trees have "gnarled" bark (42), and the wood paneling is "moldering" (64). Everything about the house and grounds appears to be falling apart or rotting in some way. These image patterns help to develop the idea that Mariana, like her surroundings, is falling apart. These images also help to develop the gothic images that are added in abundance to the second poem. The destruction of the house, the dark and rainy atmosphere, "the flitting of the bats" (17), the reference to midnight (25), the creaking doors, and the

references to ghosts all help to contribute to the prototypical Gothicism of the poem. Such images also associate with death, which Mariana longs for, and general gloom, which she is experiencing deeply. Images of water and wetness in "Mariana" contrast directly with images of heat and drought used in the former version. In the first version, the riverbed is empty and "dusty-white" (54). The only source of water is "shallows on a distant shore" (7), and Mariana herself is until the end unable to cry. Tennyson writes, "day increased from heat to heat, / On stony drought and steaming salt," (39-40). While the dryness of the images is a brilliant way to symbolize Mariana's inability to cry as reflected in her surroundings, Tennyson must have decided he wanted something different for his poem. In the second version, those dryness images are changed to images of wetness. Mariana cries almost constantly in this poem, which reads, "Her tears fell with the dews at even; / Her tears fell ere the dews were dried," (13-14). This draws an obvious comparison between her tears and the dew, which shows the reader that Tennyson intended the wet images to reflect Mariana's tears in her surroundings. He writes about the "blackened waters" of a sluice nearby (38). He also describes the rust, mold, and moss of the house and its grounds, all things that cannot exist without water. Perhaps he wanted Mariana to be able to cry, so as to appear more emotional and desperate. Perhaps he needed the wetness in order to describe things as rotting and molding. No doubt he had both of these purposes in mind when he made the change. The water serves another purpose in the second poem as well. Whereas the bodies of water that did exist in the first version are swiftly moving bodies (a river and the ocean), the water in the second version is in

the form of a moat or a " sluice with blackened waters" (38). The slow-motion aspect of the second poem's water images helps to emphasize the slowness of life for Mariana, with her " slow clock ticking" (73). Without her lover, she is doomed to pass through her " dreary" life alone. The passage of time would happen incredibly slowly for someone who is completely alone forever, so Tennyson uses these images to develop the symbolism of her surroundings as representative of her life. Another important image pattern Tennyson adds to the second version is the use of pathetic fallacies. Mariana sees her home as a " lonely moated grange" (8), the morning as having grey eyes (31), and the sluice as sleeping (38). Of course these inanimate objects do not have eyes and cannot sleep or feel lonely, but the fact that Mariana projects her own emotions onto them suggests mental illness. Her extreme depression has caused her to see her sadness as enveloping her entire world. A final image pattern, and one of the most interesting, consists of the images that portray men as fearful or loathsome. The sun, that means only another day of pain for Mariana, is referred to as " sloping toward [his] western bower" (78). It is telling that Mariana considers the sun, which is surely something to be dreaded for her, to be male. The most interesting example of the man-fearing imagery comes in the form of a tree. The poplar's shadow falls " Upon her bed, across her brow," (56). If the tree is seen as a phallic symbol and thus representative of men, the fact that it falls across her bed represents the sexual aspect of her fear, and that it falls also across her brow represents the mental domination she experienced under him. Later, the sound the poplar makes in the wind, " all confound[s] / Her sense," (74-75). It seems that through the images that suggest maleness,

Tennyson is implying Mariana's inherent fear and hatred of men because of some previous abuse by a man, presumably her missing lover. It is apparent through evaluation of the changes made from Tennyson's "Mariana in the South" to his "Mariana," especially the addition and deletion of images, that Tennyson was not satisfied with his original version of the poem. Mariana was simply too beautiful and hopeful to be truly pitied. Through changes of literary devices, he creates a Mariana who is despairing so deeply as to live in an equally desolate environment. The endings of each poem perfectly illustrate the changes he made. The first poem's ending reads, "' The night comes on that knows not morn, / When I shall cease to be all alone, / To live forgotten, and love forlorn" (95-96). This ending, with its reference to a "night that knows not morn," implies Mariana's death. The second poem's ending reads, "' He will not come,' she said; / She wept, ' I am weary, weary, / Oh God, that I were dead!" (80-82). In the second poem, she is not even granted the peace of death. The true hopelessness of the second poem surpasses any attempts at such an emotion in the first.