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문학석사학위논문

# Moving from Melancholy:

The Creative Poetics of Christina Rossetti's *Maude*

우울함에서 움직이기:

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## Abstract

# Moving from Melancholy:

## The Creative Poetics of Christina Rossetti's

### *Maude*

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This thesis illuminates the role of Tractarian reserve and ritualism in subverting the negative effects of melancholy in Christina Rossetti's novella, *Maude* (1850). Building on previous studies of Tractarian poetics, Rossetti's titular main protagonist is shown to use religion and ritualism in order to transcend her socially induced melancholy. The Introduction defines melancholy utilizing David G. Riede's theoretical reading of melancholy in nineteenth-century English poetry as the product of a "divided self" resulting from social pressures fragmenting an otherwise "infinite" interiority. The first chapter concerns the nature of melancholy specific to *Maude*, how it results from the pressures to bend her artistic ambitions to Victorian society's conventions on gender, class, and religious conventions. *Maude* is read as asserting or signaling her melancholy in order to counter the social pressures that surround her and

to protect her identity as a poet from the encroaching pressures of becoming an “Angel in the House” or an Anglican nun. The second chapter focuses on the significance of the Book of Ecclesiastes in Maude’s poetics, discussing how she appropriates both the melancholy and religious contemplation of this text to bring out a creative aesthetic between art and religion. Ecclesiastes is shown to be a melancholic text that, at the same time, justifies artistic productivity. The third chapter discusses Rossetti’s Tractarian religio-literary influences in more detail by examining the ways in which they shaped and promoted her melancholic and artistic impulses. Utilizing biographical details and previous studies on the Tractarian poetics outlined by John Keble and other poets of the Oxford Movement, *Maude* is read as an attempt to reconcile the vanity of melancholic poetry and the main character’s sense of religious decorum. Thus, Maude is interpreted as rejecting the roles of the Angel in the House and the Anglican nun, and, instead, finding a way of accommodating her art within her religious convictions, as opposed to forcing herself to reject outright either her poetry or her beliefs. Ultimately, Maude is understood as adopting the Tractarian poetics of reserve in order to work against the melancholy in a “movement outward,” a maneuver described by Isobel Armstrong in her version of the Victorian expressive theory of poetry, effectively using both her religion and her melancholy to realize her art. This “movement outward” is illustrated through close readings of Maude’s poetry, illuminating Rossetti’s own productive dialectic between melancholy and the Tractarian poetics of reserve.

**Keywords:** Christina Rossetti, Maude, melancholy, Tractarianism,  
Oxford Movement, Angel in the House, Ecclesiastes

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# Introduction: Genesis: The Productivity of Melancholy

“It’s a very sad poem.”

“Young girls are sad. They like to be; it makes them feel strong.”

—A. S. Byatt, *Possession*

In her seminal essay on Victorian women’s poetry “A Music of Thine Own” (1994), Isobel Armstrong speaks of an “expressive tradition” of Victorian women’s poetry, of a “doubleness” of voice that is, on the surface, “often simple, often pious, often conventional” but, upon closer inspection, questioning the very conventions that it superficially upholds (324). As Byatt incisively asserts in *Possession*, her novel on Victorian poetry and literary scholarship dedicated to Armstrong, women’s poems of sadness can be understood as having more than one reading. While undoubtedly inspiring feelings of melancholy in readers, there is, at a different level, a redemptive aspect to every poem of sadness. This feature does not necessarily depend on any turn within the lines of the text, although many poems labeled as melancholic do, indeed, include such an affective textual surface; the fundamentally redemptive quality of the melancholic poem resides in the fact that it exists at all. When applying Armstrong’s theory of the doubleness of women’s Victorian poetry, even the most desolate melancholic surface voice can be heard not merely as

nihilistic angst, but as a struggle for meaning and existence that begets beauty and knowledge. The poem that readers see before them thus functions as the very product or creation of this noble struggle.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) is a poet with a melancholic reputation. Portraits repeatedly depict her as a solitary figure clad head-to-toe in ascetic black, and critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have characterized her as a poet of resignation and hope deferred (587). What is perhaps often overlooked is the fact she was also a prolific writer who enjoyed literary fame in her own lifetime; she was even considered a viable candidate for the position of poet laureate after Tennyson's death (*Flowers xlv*). Thus, despite her gloomy demeanor and renunciatory stance, she was a productive artist. While this may seem a contradiction, due to a tendency to conflate melancholy with debilitating depression, I argue that melancholy is, on the contrary, an enabling affective artistic agent, and that Rossetti illustrates, in *Maude*, a method in which melancholy can be controlled to empower creativity.

*Maude* was written when Rossetti was nineteen years old, and published posthumously. This three-part novella depicts the life of an ambitious, devout, and melancholic young poet, who is conflicted by society's gendered expectations, her artistic desire, and Christian demands for self-denial. This conflict is encoded into the fourteen poems featured within the narrative, especially the eleven works that are presented as Maude's compositions. What is particularly notable about the poetry that appears in *Maude* is that despite the profusion of melancholic emotion in

the poems, they are disciplined and controlled in their form; half of the works are sonnets while the other half includes a hymn (“Thank God, Thank God, We Do Believe”), a tripartite epithalamium (“Three Nuns”), and a nursery rhyme (“Fade, Tender Lily”). While the narrative itself is seemingly a melancholic one, as the main protagonist in the process of realizing her art meets a tragic end, I argue that Maude’s success as an artist can be traced through the evolution of her thinking in her poetry, which transitions from melancholic into a movement outwards from melancholy, assisted by religious poetic principles.

*Maude* is widely considered by critics to be largely autobiographical, because—in addition to similarities between Rossetti and Maude in terms of social background, interests, and appearance—the text is viewed as exploring issues relating to a broken engagement that occurred due to religious differences in the year Rossetti completed the manuscript (Leighton 373). The relationship ended when Rossetti’s fiancé, the painter James Collinson of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, re-converted to Roman Catholicism, making the union impossible for the Anglican Rossetti. In fact, throughout the relationship, Collinson had struggled to reconcile his role as an artist with his identity as a religious person; he also resigned from the Brotherhood upon his re-conversion to Rome (Marsh 115–16). Thus, the theme of conflict between artistic, religious, and societal obligations must have been doubly on the young Rossetti’s mind, having witnessed it in Collinson, and having experienced it herself as a young Christian woman and aspiring poet of the Victorian

middle classes.

At the start of the text, socially withdrawn Maude is seen creating opportunities to display her talent to her community and peers. At a birthday party, she proposes a game of verse composition using a given rhyme scheme and presents an exemplar of black humor; the other two participants, both more representative of Victorian middle-class femininity, produce poems with safer, more conventional perspectives. As the narrative progresses, Maude feels increasingly guilty over her literary pursuits, presenting her cousin and confidante, Agnes, with a poem that alludes to her unease. Maude subsequently has an accident—her hackney cab is overturned—and is confined to her bed. She meets with her parish priest and is absolved of her religious guilt, bringing about a new peace, but, from the narrative situation alone, it is uncertain how she resolved the conflict between her religious beliefs and her poetic ambition. This redemption and growth can only be discerned by closely reading Maude’s poems, embedded throughout the text and presented by the narrator in a specific sequence that charts the movement of Maude’s reasoning.

My thesis thus explores the relationship between Maude’s melancholy and artistic creativity by examining Maude’s poetry and its context within the *Künstlerroman* narrative. For an important final revelation is that Maude’s melancholic period was artistically prolific; at the end of the work, a friend tasked with carrying out Maude’s final wishes is “astonished at the variety of Maude’s compositions” (296) that she finds among her belongings. Additionally, Maude’s melancholy is

productive not only in terms of quantity, but also discursively in terms of its conflict with her religious devotion and society's expectations of femininity. I will demonstrate how the melancholic poems Maude composes frequently concern the conflicts between her artistic ambitions and the societal pressures of matrimony and motherhood, religious beliefs, or anxieties about her choices. Ultimately, it is my contention that, although Maude dies at the end of the novella, she does find a path that suggests reconciliation between the demands of her religious devotion, gender, and art through utilization of a poetics of religious reserve as advocated by John Keble—leader of the Tractarian Movement, bestselling poet, and Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1831 to 1841—in order to move beyond the poetics of melancholy. This idea of a poetics of religious reserve, also referred to as Tractarian poetics or the “poetics of reserve,” will be developed throughout this thesis, culminating in a close examination of its mechanics in Chapter Three. Although Mary Arseneau has agreed that a similar process of melancholy controlled by Tractarian reserve is at work in *Maude*, she has not closely examined how this movement occurs, only suggesting that the reason for Maude's shift in her poetics was mainly to accommodate Rossetti's religious beliefs (93). In this thesis, I will chart this movement from the poetics of melancholy to that of reserve by closely reading the poetry of “Maude” and contextualizing the conflicts the poems represent in their socio-historical context. In this process, I hope to offer fresh insights about the intricacies of Rossetti's artistic creativity.

## The Productive Tradition of Poetic Melancholy in Nineteenth-Century England

It is not surprising to see an aspiring young writer in the nineteenth century utilizing a poetics of melancholy, as a tradition of melancholic sensibility was prevalent among poets during the long nineteenth century. Rossetti worked within the Romantic tradition of the post-Wordsworthian poets, of Byron, Shelley or Keats; in particular, Keats was a significant influence, attested by the fact that Rossetti wrote her poem “On Keats” as tribute. David Riede, in *Allegories of One’s Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry*, notes the seeming paradox of how melancholy, against expectations, seems to stimulate the production of poetry instead of hindering it:

Coleridge’s dejection anticipated the more poetically productive melancholy of the first generation of post-Wordsworthian poets: the titanic suffering of Byron’s gloomy heroes, the bleak skepticism of Shelley, and the luxuriant melancholy of Keats, but it more accurately anticipated the later dejection of the Victorians, who often saw melancholy as we now see depression, as a mute or incoherent mood that imprisons the sufferer within himself and the precise antithesis of poetic creativity. Ironically, however, as we shall see, the rejection or policing of melancholy actually intensifies melancholy as it divides the mind more emphatically against itself and, more, the Victorian melancholy of melancholy

turns out to be poetically productive rather than disabling. (1–2)

Riede continues his argument connecting the melancholy of the Romanticists with that of the Victorians by drawing a continuum between the “infinite inwardness” of the poetic sensibilities of both eras, and asserting that, in the Victorian age, this sense of the Romantic, infinite self was beset by the “finite actuality” of the reifying and compartmentalizing qualities of nineteenth-century capitalism and by the rise of scientific intellectualism or the “disappearance of God” (8). Under this schema, the fragmentation of the self subsequently leads to conflict between the fragmented selves, manifesting in the melancholy affect. Riede states that, under this division of self, melancholy turns out to be “poetically productive rather than disabling” (2) in creating a dialectic, in the form of poetry, between an “infinite self” and a fragmented, policing conscience. His understanding of the poetics of melancholy is, in the end, “the ways that the ‘buried life’ of the infinite self, perceived as anterior to language, could find expression” (17).

This “infinite self” of the Romantic soul can also be said to be the content of literary “genius.” Consequently, the display of such boundless interiority through the display of melancholy is effectively a signaling of literary genius, a conceit that Maude is shown to understand and exploit. Still later on, Maude’s mature poetic voice developed by the end of the novella is read as resulting from her use of the Tractarian poetics of reserve as the “rejecting or policing of melancholy” (Riede 2). This rejecting or policing, a dialectic process between Tractarian emotional

reserve and melancholy, enables the expression of Maude's infinite self beyond the confines of her situation.

## **The Poetics of Tractarian Reserve**

As discussed previously, nineteenth-century literary melancholy can be said to arise from the conflict between “a Romantic sense of the infinite, mysterious depths of the self with a Victorian sense of the finite socially constructed ‘character’” (Riede 8). For Rossetti, the “mysterious depths of the self” most likely pertain to her literary imagination; I will illustrate in Chapters One and Two that the melancholic poetry of *Maude* results from the conflict between Maude's ideas about the particular limited set of Victorian “finite socially constructed ‘character[s]’” available to her: namely the Angel in the House, the nun, and the artist. At this point, the role of Rossetti's religion in her work requires attention considering its central importance in her poetry.

Rossetti was an intensely religious person. Specifically, her faith was shaped by the rise of Tractarian Anglicanism—also known as the Oxford Movement or High Church Movement—during the Victorian era. From 1843, Rossetti attended services at Christ Church on Albany Street, which was a Tractarian establishment (Marsh 55). The term “Tractarianism” refers to a movement within the Church of England that gathered force from the 1830s when its leaders—clerical Oxford dons—published a series of tracts entitled *Tracts for the Times*. These works, which outlined their preferred doctrines and practices, emphasized

ritualism. For instance, they argued for the Church of England to adopt more stylized rituals including auricular confession, more elaborate vestments for the clergy, and a Gothic revival in church architecture (Melnyk 23–27). The Tractarians are also known for their interest in literary aesthetics. Mark Knight and Emma Mason assert that “Tractarianism is perhaps the most literary of those nineteenth-century theologies” because its key figures—John Keble, John Henry Newman, Edward Bouvier Pusey, and Isaac Williams—were “poets as well as preachers,” so that Tractarianism was consequently “grounded in poetics as much as theology” (87).

Kirstie Blair, in her study on the relationship between poetic form and religious faith in the Victorian era, connects High Church ritualism with the strict poetic forms practiced by adherents to the Tractarian literary aesthetic. “Ritual ‘fortifies’ the mind against ‘natural thoughts,’” she asserts, “Forms here supply the necessary self-discipline, a way of focusing the individual’s mind on submission to God and his laws rather than on his or her own relatively petty thoughts and feelings” (30). John Keble (1792–1866), Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1831 to 1841, was particularly influential in both his theory of Tractarian poetics (the key dynamic of which involves the healthy release of emotions through controlled form) and his own application of said poetics. Blair presents the poems of Keble’s bestseller *The Christian Year* as the epitome of Tractarian poetry in its usage of regular meter that soothes, strengthens, and disciplines the reader through the application of its orderly form (40).

Notably, Knight and Mason single out Rossetti as an example of a Tractarian poet who practiced “ritualist poetry” and who used the poem as a “spiritual space” or “an incandescent portal into God’s mysteries, just as the somber and shadowed ritualist church space was illuminated by endless candles catching the light from priests’ vestments, crystalline chalices, and stained glass” (108). These images of ritual or self-discipline, however, are not about the repression of feelings through a rigid adherence to form, but about the modulation and better expression of feelings (such as melancholy) in a controlled, productive manner. Emma Francis makes this clear in her examination of Keble’s influence on Victorian women’s poetry, where Tractarian sensibility shapes, calibrates, and ultimately enables emotion to build up in intensity and express itself more fully (123). I argue that this controlling and ultimately enabling quality of the Tractarian “poetics of reserve” (Arseneau 67) is the true religious voice aimed at by Rossetti’s Maude.

In a sense, *Maude* traces the artistic growth of a young Tractarian poet, the kind of poet Rossetti herself would become. This can be observed by how Maude’s melancholy is gradually controlled and modulated by her “poetics of reserve” that are close to Rossetti’s own Tractarian literary aesthetics. At this point, Armstrong’s “expressive tradition,” or expressive theory of Victorian women poets, is particularly useful in this examination of the dynamic between melancholy and religious (Tractarian) ritualism. Recalling Blair’s comments on the Tractarian poetic modes of the soothing and strengthening qualities of

regular meter, the controlled form of Maude's poems can indicate ritualistic thinking in poems that are otherwise melancholic in content. Either part of the double voice—in other words, the surface conventional or the underlying subversive—can manifest either melancholy or spiritual devotion, suggesting a dialectic of modulation between melancholy and ritualistic form. When integrating the poetics of Tractarian reserve with melancholy, a poem of melancholy can be read as inversely, through its form, as expressing an “underlying” religious redemption; conversely, the “surface” voice of an outwardly pious poem can be read as enabling the control and regulation of an implied or anterior melancholy. Either case results in the creation of meaningful art in the process.

For clarification, I will elaborate on my thesis through a case-study reading of Christina Rossetti's “The World,” which is reproduced in full below:

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:  
But all night as the moon so changeth she;  
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy  
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.  
By day she woos me to the outer air,  
Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:  
But through the night, a beast she grins at me,  
A very monster void of love and prayer.  
By day she stands a lie: by night she stands  
In all the naked horror of the truth

With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.

Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell

My soul to her, give her my life and youth,

Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell? (70)

Here, a melancholic description of the profane world as “A very monster void of love and prayer” (8) with “pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands” (11) articulates a detachment from such a sphere and a turning towards higher, sacred truths. The only word that directly references religion is “prayer” (8), although descriptions of the devil such as “pushing horns” (11) and “cloven” (14) feet also hint at a Christian subtext. The surface voice expresses melancholic disgust of the “Loathsome and foul” (3) secular world that threatens to overwhelm the speaker, while the underlying voice of focused competence and control formally checks the speaker from succumbing to the temptations of “Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety” (6).

The form is particularly indicative of the Tractarian poetics of reserve. Specifically, the poem is a sonnet, arguably the most proscribed poetic form in English literature. Joseph Phelan emphasizes the fact that the history of the devotional sonnet is nearly as long as that of the amatory, and highlights the influence Wordsworth’s *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* had on religious Victorian poets (85). Joshua Taft notes that Rossetti understood the sonnet to be “a battleground between Petrarchan love and Christian devotion,” and that it is consequently well suited to represent conflict between secular and religious modes (318). Taft also connects Keble’s

approval of the restrictiveness of the sonnet form with Rossetti's preference for the restrictiveness of the Petrarchan form over the looser English model (319). The above sonnet is also Petrarchan, following the *abbaabba* rhyme scheme for the octave and a regimented *cdcede* rhyme scheme for the sestet; this order and control reflects the attempt for emotional control under Tractarian poetics. Indeed, the Petrarchan sonnet form was heavily utilized by the Tractarians, as evidenced in *Lyra Apostolica*, a collection of poetry published in 1836 by the key poets—J. W. Bowden, Richard Froude, John Keble, Henry Newman, Isaac Wilberforce, and Isaac Williams—within the movement (Tennyson 130, 135, 136). Elizabeth Ludlow further associates Rossetti's utilization of the sonnet form within her religious context, or her "hermeneutics of piety," by connecting the arrangement of her devotional sonnets' images to the structure of the Psalms (35). Throughout this thesis, there will be examples of Maude using the Bible as an intertextual touchstone for authority and subtext, such as her paraphrases. For now, it must be noted that Maude's writing of religious sonnets must also be understood as religious acts that take on literary form, and any reading or discussion concerning them should consider the possible interactions with scripture in terms of both form and content.

The presence of a double voice, however, is not exclusively a matter of form against content; in Tractarian poetics, emotion can be modulated not only through ritualistic form, but also through religious content. A conventional-seeming devotional poem is often the result of

such modulation, and therefore a subtext of the modulated emotion (often melancholy, in the case of Rossetti) can be discerned from closely reading the text. An example of this is Rossetti's "The Love of Christ which Passeth Knowledge," which is an outwardly devout poem that nevertheless is working against a hidden voice or subtext of melancholy:

A thief upon My right hand and My left;

Six hours alone, athirst, in misery:

At length in death one smote My heart and cleft

A hiding-place for thee.

Nailed to the racking cross, than bed of down

More dear, whereon to stretch Myself and sleep:

So did I win a kingdom,—share My crown;

A harvest,—come and reap. (21–28; 60)

Its surface message of hope: "At length in death one smote My heart and cleft / A hiding-place for thee" (23–24) answers an unspoken, underlying voice of despair in search of succor or such "hiding-place" (24). The poem takes on a hymnic structure, with stanzas that are quatrains of iambic verse with a simple *abab* rhyme scheme. Such a structure is evocative of the hymn, which, among other things, is often joyful or consoling. The need for consolation is alluded to through the persistent references to pain: "athirst, in misery" (22), "in death one smote My heart" (23), and "Nailed to the racking cross" (25). Yet, each instance of suffering is accompanied by an instance of relief: "a hiding-place for

thee” (24) or “bed of down” (25). This dialectic of pain and consolation is reflective of the dialectic of melancholy and ritualized form observed in the previous example of Rossetti’s poetry. These poems both represent the dialectic between melancholy and Tractarian reserve, whether in terms of form or content, and are the products of it; as such, they attest to the productivity of melancholy and its modulation.

### **Previous Studies on the Melancholy of *Maude***

As Cynthia Scheinberg has pointed out, Rossetti’s intricate use of religion is more discursive than has been discussed by many critics, especially those associated with second-wave feminism, who regard the influence of religion as singularly oppressive (9). This dismissive attitude may be exemplified by Gilbert and Gubar’s remark wherein Rossetti is “banqueting on bitterness” and feels she “must bury herself alive in a coffin of renunciation” (575). In response to twentieth-century feminists’ tendencies to dismiss or criticize the influence of religion on Rossetti’s work, critics sought to understand the Tractarian aspects of Rossetti’s oeuvre. G. B. Tennyson began this movement in 1981 by heralding Rossetti as “the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry” (198) and calling for an examination of her Tractarian poetics as a key to understanding her work (203).

Since this early study, a number of critics have produced readings that diversify the earlier interpretation of Rossetti’s religion as merely oppressive or repressive. For instance, Arseneau has focused on the role

of female communities in Anglo-Catholic contexts that show the empowering influence of religion on the Rossetti's life and work (3). In her reading of "Maude" in particular, Arseneau locates a Tractarian "poetics of reserve" within the conflicts of the story and the embedded poetry, positioning religion as a crucial aesthetic keystone that completes the "reticence, secrecy, mastery, renunciation, modesty, and detachment which are the hallmarks of Rossetti's poetic style" (67). Tractarian reserve is, thus, seen as a key to Rossetti's mastery of the poetic form, a heuristic for the control (not repression) of her creative impulses to productive effect. Dinah Roe, in her study of Rossetti's faith, delves into an analysis of the poet's relatively neglected devotional prose and argues for a more nuanced view than regarding religion as scaffolding for subversion (5). This thought is an echo from Diane D'Amico, who cautions against diminishing the influence of Tractarianism for the sake of reductive political agendas, and asserts Rossetti's "hopeful and joyous messages" tend to be ignored as a consequence (64). It is clear that a purely historical or psychological approach cannot create a full historical or psychological picture of Rossetti's work, and that an understanding of the Tractarian poetics of reserve is essential in any reading of her poetry.

In the context of this previous research, the religious aspect of Rossetti's poetry is a key catalyst in the expression of her artistry, not an afterthought or a subterfuge of social propriety. I argue that melancholy is subjected to the religious catalyst of restraint and intensified expression. This religious modulation, or the Tractarian poetics of reserve, is utilized

by Maude as a form of Victorian expressive theory, which enables her not only to overcome her melancholy or possible depression, but also to use it to create poetry in a productive act of redemptive artistry.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I will outline the major conflicts in *Maude* between literary ambition, socially gendered expectations, and religious ideals. The dynamics of these conflicts will be interpreted through the poetry within the story, enabling a contextualized understanding of Maude's concerns as an aspiring writer, woman, and devout Christian in nineteenth-century England. Chapter Two concerns the narrative's central conflict between Maude's expressed melancholy and her Christian conception of vanity as sin. Chapter Three presents my interpretation of Maude's solution for reconciling these different priorities, where I examine how she uses the poetics of reserve to harness the poetics of melancholy to artistically productive effect. The precise mechanism of this harnessing will be revealed through a close reading of the sequence of Maude's final poems. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of the implications of Maude's solution, for our understanding of both Rossetti's work and on the work of religious writers in general.

# Chapter One: The Poetics of Melancholy and Gender

## Maude and the Assertion of Melancholy

The narrator introduces the eponymous heroine of Christina Rossetti's "Maude" through the following words:

She also knew that people thought her clever, and that her little copies of verses were handed about and admired. Touching these same verses, it was the amazement of every one what could make her poetry so broken-hearted as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down as affected. (266)

Although the narrator suggests that readers should "form their own estimate of Maude's character" (266), this passage invites the readers to find her as "affected" more than having "any secret source of uneasiness." In the scene that follows this description, we are given a comical description of Maude, who has just finished writing a melancholic sonnet about the nobility of suffering; upon finishing, she "yawned, leaned back on her chair, and wondered how she should fill the time till dinner" (266). In addition, while other poems in "Maude" were published elsewhere in Rossetti's lifetime, the sonnet in question—"Yes, I too could face death and never shrink"—was not (Penguin Classics, 831). The work's omission

from print culture during Rossetti's life hints that she may have found this sonnet unworthy. Indeed, the fact that she uses it to illustrate Maude's folly may be indication enough that she found it juvenile:

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:  
But it is harder to bear hated life;  
To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;  
To drag the heavy chain whose every link  
Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink  
Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife  
With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife  
Nor strike home: this is courage as I think.  
Surely to suffer is more than to do:  
To do is quickly done; to suffer is  
Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses:  
Each day's experience testifies of this:  
Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;  
Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees? — (265–66)

The poem is an exhibition of melancholy from beginning to end, with almost every line save three starting with a long-stressed sound, giving the impression of grim determination (when trochaic) or of a dragging and slow rhythm (when spondaic). The trochees “Yes, I” (1), “Galls to” (5), “Of the” (6), “Surely” (9), “Longer” (11), and “Thousands” (14) begins their respective lines with dramatic declaration, and combined with the overall content of the poem imbues the speaker's voice with judgment,

perhaps as if from God or an avenging angel. The spondees throughout the poem slow down the rhythm, adding to the gloomy mood. They also occur in key images: “deep grave” (6), “strike home” (8), “heart-sicknesses” (11), “full cup” (14) are all melancholic images, and the slowing effect of the spondee makes readers linger in the image of the deep grave, the strike upon home, sickness in the heart, and the full cup of suffering. The aphorism of line thirteen, “Good deeds are many, good lives are few,” is sonically built on parallel spondees of “Good deeds” and “good lives,” drawing comparison between the two and inserting a ponderous, existential observation that adds to the angst of the poem.

Yet despite the melancholy of the poem, the strength in the meter and the terse lengths of the lines betray more power through control rather than give the reader a sense of powerlessness or loss of control. The final two lines seem to show contempt for the members of the speaker’s milieu who do not “drain the lees” (14), instead living an existence that is incomplete in its “goodness” (possibly of Christian goodness or artistic integrity, considering the themes of *Maude*). This distancing of herself from such people draws towards herself a strong sense of vocation that distinguishes her from the crowd; in fact, this final line is from Matthew 20:22,<sup>1</sup> and the speaker is dramatically comparing her suffering to Jesus’s own sacrifice. The answer to the sonnet’s final question—“who drains the lees?”—seems to be the author herself. Therefore, the underside to the

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<sup>1</sup> “But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.”

melancholy of this sonnet is a feeling of control and ambition.

Maude's melancholy in this poem and the others discussed in this chapter relate to with what Showalter identifies, in her essay on *Maude*, as Rossetti's own "anxieties about poetic achievement, her wishes both to be admired for her genius and to renounce it as unfeminine" ("Introduction" ix). While the poem can be read in many different ways—for example, as a grim anthem to Christian sacrifice—it can also be seen as an artist's manifesto or declaration of creative intent. Indeed, it has the strategic position of being the first poem in a story about a young aspiring poet, and sets the tone of Maude's artistry. In this sense, her melancholy is a result of the conflict between her literary ambition and the external pressures against it. These pressures upon Maude's "unfeminine" ambition are the gravity that works upon the "heavy chains" (4) of her desire to be a writer, and the emotional result of such exertions is the melancholy that is present in the poem.

As mentioned before, this melancholy is, however, treated with some skepticism by the narrator. Maude's yawning and wondering what to do to fill the time before dinner imply that some simulation of depth, or "faking," is going on in the poem. Anne Finch (1661–1720) critiques this "faking" of melancholy and its intended effect on others' perceptions in her poem "The Spleen":

The fool, to imitate the wits,  
Complains of thy pretended fits,  
And dullness, born with him, would lay

Upon thy accidental sway;  
Because, sometimes, thou dost presume  
Into the ablest heads to come:  
That, often, men of thoughts refined,  
Impatient of unequal sense,  
Such slow returns, where they so much dispense,  
Retiring from the crowd, are to thy shades inclined. (64–73)

The “fool” (64) affects melancholy in order to imitate the “wits” (64) and be perceived as clever as the wits are, for the spleen—thought to be the source of melancholy during Finch’s time—is where “men of thoughts refined” (70), when tiring of the mediocrity of “the crowd” (73), seek sanctuary. Thus, melancholy was understood simultaneously as an indication of disappointment in one’s community and a marker of intellectual superiority. This is not to say Maude’s anxieties are necessarily inauthentic; her relaxed manner after composing the poem may simply indicate a temporary exorcism of anxieties through the process of writing. The narrator’s skepticism may be a reflection of the normative gaze of Maude’s society, the kind of judgment in “The Spleen,” upon Maude’s ambitions. However, this disdain of Maude’s melancholy softens into sympathy as the narrative progresses; *Maude* is not, in the end, a satirical work. The narrator’s shift in how Maude’s melancholy is interpreted—from it being a performance to being authentic—may be read, instead, as a critique of the normative gaze that distorts the melancholy of young literary women as being pretentious. For there is

something more than Maude being a “fool” (64) imitating the “wits” (64). This act may be better understood within the context of Douglas Trevor’s argument that such expression of melancholy is a gesticulation towards a worthy subjectivity (2). Therefore, to make such gesticulations of gloominess and withdrawal is to signal “unequal sense” (71), or extraordinary intelligence, thus producing the impression of a subjectivity worthy of the interest of others. As Finch recognized in “The Spleen,” because melancholy poets tend to be deemed more interesting and authentic, some poets may express melancholy in order to assert their identity as poets. In other words, Maude in this instance is utilizing her melancholy to signal her identity as a poet.

This expressive aspect of melancholy can be understood as part of a larger behavioral pattern of Maude signaling her literary subjectivity. At this early point in the story, Maude utilizes another self-fashioning strategy by simultaneously revealing and concealing her writing. Significantly, she composes her poem in the sitting room, so that she is “visibly slipping out of sight some scrawled paper” (265) as her mother enters. Maude could have written in her bedroom if she had desired privacy, but she has positioned herself in a communal part of the house where she can easily be discovered. She also hides her writing as she is being interrupted; the writing itself may not be visible but the act of hiding it is (and ultimately, the fact that she is writing). This is arguably deliberate; Maude does not necessarily want others to know what she is writing, but she seems to want others to know that she *is* writing. At Mrs

Strawdy's tea party in Chapter Two of Part Two, she declines, with obvious distaste, to recite some of her poetry when prompted: "You will excuse me;" Maude at last said very coldly: "I could not think of monopolizing every one's attention" (279). Yet, when a cousin presents her with a wreath that sports a bay leaf symbolizing poetic achievement, despite Maude's protestation that, "I have not earned the bay," the narrator notes immediately after, "still she did not remove it" (268). Maude's implicit revelation of her writing to her mother and others is like the unearned bay leaf: it signals her authorial identity to the outside world.

## **Melancholy and Killing the Angel in the House**

If Maude were confident in her identification as an artist, she would not feel the need to continuously assert her claim to being one. However, the persistence of her signaling inversely indicates that such an identity is constantly under attack. There are different kinds of pressures working against Maude's ambitions in the novella, beginning with the burden to conform to the ideal of domestic virtue as exemplified by Coventry Patmore's depiction of his deceased wife in "The Angel in the House," an ideal that women of Maude's time and class in England were strongly encouraged to aspire to. Nina Auerbach states that, in the Victorian era, the Angel in the House was "convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be" (67), a woman who would willingly sacrifice her personal interests for her husband and children. Aparna Gollapudi states that this myth was so widespread during

this time that it even managed to go beyond its bourgeoisie origins to cross class boundaries, effectively enshrining (and confining) women of both middle and aristocratic classes in the domestic sphere (81). Reflecting back in the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf describes the Angel in the House as follows:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. (141)

As Woolf notes, this ideal was pervasive in its time: “In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel” (141). Woolf’s argument is particularly relevant to Maude’s situation as an aspiring writer; the insidious presence of the Angel in the House is satirically personified in Woolf’s essay as a literal angel that physically and verbally interferes with Woolf’s writing. Woolf describes how she decided as a young writer that the only way she could write about “the truth about human relations, morality, sex” (142) was to “kill” the Angel in the House: “Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing” (141). Maude also attempts to “kill” the Angel in the House by expressing, instead of concealing, her melancholy, and by rebelling against the Victorian domestic norms through her poetry. But, in order to read Maude’s poems as such, her

characterization within the novella as being antithetical to the Angel in the House needs to be drawn out for context.

Maude is not described as being particularly feminine or maternal. In terms of appearance, she has “a habitual shrugging stoop” (266) and an unhealthy pallor or “a fixed paleness” (266) so noticeable that it draws comments from different characters throughout the novella. The clearest sign of Maude’s distance from the Angel-in-the-House ideal is the contrast between Maude and her cousins, Mary and Agnes, who are exemplars of the Angel in the House. Although Agnes is a year older than Mary, the two sisters bear strong twin-like similarities with each other. Indeed, while they and Magdalen all serve as “alternate selves” for Maude and “doubles” for the young Rossetti within the story (Gilbert and Gubar 550), the similarities are particularly striking between the sisters. The narrator emphasizes this similarity by noting that: “both were well-grown and well-made, with fair hair, blue eyes and fresh complexions” (267). Mary and Agnes are pretty, healthy, and personable, although Agnes is more mature and self-effacing than her younger sister. Agnes may be understood as an older, more maternal version of Mary, an “Auntie,” as described by nineteenth-century novelist Dinah Maria Mulock.<sup>2</sup> Neither character transgresses her proscribed social boundaries, nor seems to have any inclination to do so. By the end of the novella, Mary is happily married, and Agnes continues her role as caregiver to her family by

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<sup>2</sup> Mulock describes this “auntie” as a happily unmarried female relation who is “[A] universal referee, nurse, playmate, comforter, and counselor . . . her manner, settled, cheerful, and at ease; her unflinching interest in all things and all people” (1597).

carrying out Maude's last wishes.

This contrast between Maude and Mary or Agnes seems intentional from the start of the text as Maude's first scene and Mary's are structurally juxtaposed. In this first scene, Maude is writing verses in her sitting room and ignoring her mother, Mrs Foster—notably another Angel in the House—who, presumably as a result of her self-abnegating service to others, is “only too much accustomed to inattention” (265). In contrast, Mary is introduced arranging flowers in “another sitting room” (266), gladly accepting her mother's request to bring Maude and Mrs. Foster from the train station. Their different attitudes to their mothers indicate similarly contrasting attitudes towards the Angel-in-the-House ideal: Maude is contemptuous of it, while Mary obeys it. Importantly, Maude is writing in her first scene, whereas Mary is performing domestic and feminine tasks. Maude's act of writing is at odds with the demands of the Angel in the House. In the opening chapter, Mrs Foster literally interrupts Maude in the act of writing by trying to get her to pay attention to a domestic matter, distracting her much like Woolf's satirical embodiment of the Angel did with the “shadow of her wings” and the “rustling of her skirt” (Woolf 141). It is also notable that it is Maude's mother who utters the opening line of the entire story: “A penny for your thoughts” (265). The line draws the reader's attention to the fact that being an author in the modern world is about being paid for your thoughts and possessing an interiority worthy of being exchanged for monetary value in the market of ideas that is print culture. Here, it is the Angel in the House that stands at

the threshold between Maude and the world of literary commerce, both symbolically and literally blocking her daughter's entry into this conventionally masculine domain. This aspect of Maude's relation with her mother also recalls Showalter's assertion of Maude's awareness and anxiety over the "unfeminine" nature of writing, a theme that resurfaces in Agnes's sonnet later on in the story.

Maude seems keen to distance herself from domestic chores that bring her closer to the Victorian feminine ideal. She does not adorn herself according to feminine conventions. For instance, she refuses Mary's offer of perfume by saying "I shall not waste eau de Cologne on my handkerchief" (277). Mary, on the other hand, is preoccupied with cultivating a feminine<sup>3</sup> appearance; Agnes reports in a letter that she "caught [Mary] before the glass, trying the effect of seringa . . . in her hair" (285). Maude is further contrasted with Mary and Agnes in a scene where the sisters are embroidering a cover for a lectern, and Maude declines to participate citing a lack of commensurate competence in needlework. When Maude asks Agnes what the symbols of the embroidery mean, Agnes answers by quoting from the Song of Solomon: "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys" (273; *King James Bible*, Solomon 2.1). A typological tradition<sup>4</sup> exists where the Rose of

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the term "feminine" shall refer to Showalter's definition in *A Literature of Their Own*: the conception of essential femininity held by nineteenth-century women writers who "wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature" ("Towards a Feminist Poetics" 137).

<sup>4</sup> Biblical types, along with paraphrases, were used in this era as an approved methodology for engaging with scripture. Within Christian typological

Sharon and the Lily of the Valley refer to Christ, for example in Robert Herrick's poem "To His Saviour, a Child; A Present by a Child":

GO, pretty child, and bear this flower  
Unto thy little Saviour;  
And tell Him, by that bud now blown,  
He is the Rose of Sharon known. (1-4)

Ann Astell notes that a typological tradition exists in which the Song of Songs is interpreted as the relationship between the Church as the bride, and Christ as the groom (167). However, Mary Dove states that there is also a history of using the language of the Song of Songs within secular literature to express profane love (46). It can also be read as a poem of contentment in sexual or marital partnership, as the speaker can be said to be a woman admiring her lover, and wishing to be together: "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies" (Solomon 2.16). I suggest that Maude, by excluding herself from the needlework offered by her cousins, is symbolically distancing herself from not only such domestic preoccupations, but also the sphere of matrimonial love depicted in the Song of Solomon, in other words, from the life of the Angel in the House.

Maude's distinction from Mary and Agnes also shows how expressed melancholy is Maude's primary defense against the

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hermeneutics, books of the Old Testament, such as the Song of Solomon, have often been read as foreshadowing of events in the New Testament. George Landow gives an example of such typological readings as follows: "A type is an anticipation of Christ. Thus Samson, who sacrificed his life for God's people, partially anticipates Christ, who repeats the action, endowing it with deeper, more complete, more spiritual significance" (22).

pervasiveness of the Angel in the House ideal. Maude is considered austere in style, but does not conceal her cleverness; Mary is the opposite, as she enjoys dressing up and does not seem to have particularly intellectual aspirations. Agnes is clever but she hides it, declaring, “One difference between us is that you are less healthy and far more clever than I am” (273). Agnes, however, is clever enough to write a poem in the “*Bouts rimés*” game, with her sister admitting as much when she puts her forward for the game: “Of course [Maude] would get on capitally, and Agnes might manage very well, and Magdalen can do anything; but it is quite beyond me” (269). Mélody Enjoubault explains that *Bouts rimés* is a poetry game, originating in the aristocratic salons of seventeenth-century France, where each contestant is given the same set of words in a set rhyme scheme and tasked with creating an original poem; it was often played by the Rossetti children when they were young (289). Agnes writes a sonnet that creates the given rhymes into a list of things she would do “Rather than writing”:

        Would that I were a turnip white,  
Or raven black,  
Or miserable hack  
        Dragging a cab from left to right;  
        Or would I were the showman of a sight,  
Or weary donkey with a laden back,  
Or racer in a sack,  
        Or freezing traveller on an Alpine height;

Or would I were straw catching as I drown,  
    (A wretched landsman I who cannot swim,)  
Or watching a lone vessel sink,  
    Rather than writing: I would change my pink  
Gauze for a hideous yellow satin gown  
    With deepcut scalloped edges and a rim. (270)

These *Bouts rimés* poems are meant to be a kind of public performance, as they were intended from the beginning to be “submitted for judgement to the discerning public” (270) of Mary’s birthday party. Maude comments that Agnes’s sonnet is not written in meter (270); William Michael Rossetti (Rossetti’s brother and biographer) remarks, “This was, of course, intentional on Christina’s part, to mark the ineptitude of [Agnes]” (490), presumably to contrast with Maude’s own command of the form. Agnes, aware of having to present socially, chooses to present a self that is reluctant to engage in the spectacle of writing, and possibly her lack of adherence to meter reflects this reluctance rather than literary incompetence. Enjoubault notes that the anaphora of the repeated “or” emphasizes this reluctance in both its persistence and simplistic construction, as if the poet regarded composition to be a chore in which to expend as little effort as possible (298). Agnes’s choice of deriding a “showman of a sight” (5)—deriding, because it is one of the less unpleasant, if still unpleasant things she would rather be than a writer—illustrates her reluctance to be the center of attention or the producer of a show. This self-effacement is, of course, in keeping with the Angel in the

House.

This championing of self-negation over gauche showmanship extends to the final lines beyond the volta of “Rather than writing” (12) wherein the indignity of writing is greater than even the graceless ostentation of “a hideous yellow satin gown / With deepcut scolloped edges and a rim” (13–14). She even puts the humble profession of “hack” (a hackney cab driver) or the animal “donkey” (which has a name with a more comical sound than “horse”) above the shamefulness of writing. There is also a gendered element to this reluctance, as “hack” (3), “showman” (5), “racer in a sack” (7), “traveller on an Alpine height” (8), and “landsman” (10) arguably all conjure up men. Rossetti is working from a tradition of Romantic, mostly male poets; Agnes’s gendering of the professions in her poem may be an indication of what Adeline Johns-Putra calls a masculinist conception of poetry and writing pervasive in this time (104), again recalling Rossetti’s anxiety that poetic ambition was unfeminine. Yet, while Agnes chooses to emphasize that she does not like writing and, by extension, is not a “writer,” it is clear from her composition that she has at least enough literary aptitude to write a thematically coherent and humorous, if not scanning, sonnet. She does not, however, choose to develop her talent the way Maude has, and judging from her attitude in her poem, it seems unlikely she ever will.

While Maude’s *Bouts rimés* sonnet is not about writing, it does deal with socially transgressive ideas:

Some ladies dress in muslin full and white,

Some gentlemen in cloth succinct and black;  
Some patronise a dog-cart, some a hack,  
    Some think a painted clarence only right.  
    Youth is not always such a pleasing sight,  
Witness a man with tassels on his back;  
Or woman in a great-coat like a sack  
    Towering above her sex with horrid height.  
If all the world were water fit to drown  
    There are some whom you would not teach to swim,  
    Rather enjoying if you saw them sink;  
    Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink,  
With roses and geraniums on their gown: —  
    Go to the Bason, poke them o'er the rim.' (271)

The octave begins with a normative worldview and gradually introduces elements of the grotesque, ending with black humor. The poem can be read as melancholic, as black humor can be an ironic manifestation of melancholy, or a satirizing of the absurd situation of the powers of policing, social pressures. The first two lines of “ladies” (1) dressed in white and “gentlemen” (2) dressed in black as in a wedding conjure images of heteronormative matrimony, the fundamental family unit upon which the Angel-of-the-House ideal is realized. Jerome McGann asserts that this particular line also implies that women who have an alternative vocation and sense of worth, enough to give up the material comforts of marriage, will find being a housewife intolerable (245). The reader knows

from the very first poem included in *Maude*, that the speaker is willing to “[drain] the lees” (14), that Maude thinks of herself as having such a mission in life. This superiority of Maude’s thinking is reflected in her superiority of form; Enjoubault asserts that the sonnet is clearly meant to be better than Agnes’s, with a more complex construction than the simple parallelisms of the conjunction “or” in the latter’s sonnet, and a stricter adherence to the octave-sestet structure, as if emphasizing Maude’s literary competence over Agnes’s (299).

This critique of social norms then shifts from gender to class; the usage of the words ladies and gentlemen instead of “women” or “men” evokes entrenched class- and gender-related codes of conduct, a theme that continues in the next two lines. The hierarchy of “dog-cart” (3), “hack” (3), and “clarence” (4) suggest socioeconomic hierarchies of the laboring, bourgeoisie, and aristocratic classes respectively. The words “patronise” (3) and “just right” (4) imply an overall smoothness in the functioning of this normative, socioeconomic order. There is a turn in line five—arguably the poem has two *volta*s, one in the middle of the octave and one in the beginning of the sestet—with the speaker beginning to describe grotesque sights such as a young man “with tassels on his back” (6) and a young woman with “horrid height” (8). The young man is vainly preoccupied with his appearance; he is probably effeminate and possibly even homosexual. Tara MacDonald notes that there was a “crisis of masculinity” during the Victorian era when the social roles of men were in flux, creating an atmosphere of anxiety concerning the newly uncertain

place of men in society (19). John Tosh states that this was partly brought on by the rise of the Angel-in-the-House ideal, as women were seen to dominate the domestic sphere, threatening men's place in the family hierarchy (108). The young man may be interpreted as an example of such social anxiety concerning the shifting of masculine ideals, and understood, therefore, as a poetic subversion of the heteronormative order of the ladies in white and gentlemen in black. The young woman is—if not a spinster—someone who would struggle to procure a match because of her stature. She may represent the phenomenon of the “redundant woman,” coined by W. R. Greg after the 1851 census revealed that over two-fifths of England's women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried (Greg 12; Mackinnon 284). The speaker has, within the space of an octave, moved from the Victorian-normative ladies and gentleman to the grotesquely effeminate man and “redundant” woman, emphasizing the presence of Victorian society's outsiders. Such a reading would imply poetic transgression on Maude's part; instead of concealing these misfits and, therefore, perpetuating the dominant narratives of Victorian society, she is exposing them to the consciences of her bourgeois acquaintances. As such, the sonnet enables these marginal Others to transgress into the respectable and normative boundaries of Mary and Agnes's middle-class home. This is in line with critics' observations of Rossetti's marked skepticism regarding the institution of marriage, particularly in its unequal treatment of women (Spaive 54).

The volta at the beginning of the sestet seems, at first, to suggest

it is the young man in tassels or the tall young woman who deserves to be drowned. But the one who does get “[poked] . . . o’er the rim” (14) of the Bason is “Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink” (12). While these old ladies may be further examples of “redundant women,” they may also represent the Angel in the House. A clue is the “pink” (12) of their dresses; in Agnes’s poem, it is a color that represents demure, normative beauty over the vulgar ostentation of yellow satin. While Agnes and Maude are not referencing each other’s poems within the story, Rossetti, by having Maude’s poem read after Agnes, may have intended this color and its symbolism in Agnes’s sonnet to echo in the memory of the reader in Maude’s. The “roses and geraniums” (13) that adorn their gowns are also flowers that are common in English gardens and households, a possible further allusion to the old ladies’ adherence to approved domestic Victorian mores; indeed, Ruskin used the English garden as a metaphor for English female domesticity in his essay “Of Queen’s Gardens.”<sup>5</sup> Another clue is that, at a later point in the story, when this sonnet is rejected from inclusion in a friend’s scrapbook, Maude conjectures that it is because the acquaintance in question “has some reprehensible old lady in her family, and so might feel hurt at my Lynch-law” (273). This connects, in the reader’s mind, the old lady in the sonnet and the old ladies in Victorian families, or the matriarchal Angels in the Houses. Maude, in

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<sup>5</sup> “This is wonderful—oh, wonderful!—to see her, with every innocent feeling fresh within her, go out in the morning into her garden to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers, and lift their heads when they are drooping, with her happy smile upon her face, and no cloud upon her brow, because there is a little wall around her place of peace” (Ruskin 165).

this sonnet, is effectively doing what Woolf described doing in her essay: killing the Angel in the House.

This “killing” of the Angel in the House must be read through the narrative context of the sonnet as well as its content. The sonnet comes right after Agnes’s in the story, creating a deliberately contrasting juxtaposition between the two. Also contextually, the sonnets are “battling” each other, as one is to be chosen to be the best in a competition. The narrator of the story seems to be creating an argument between the two perspectives, that of Agnes’s Angel in the House, and Maude’s murderous social subversive. Gilbert and Gubar, in their discussion of the anxiety of influence in women writers of the nineteenth century, identify a narrative pattern in which creative women are pitted against the social pressures of the Angel in the House. This is often artistically represented as a clash of violence, for example in “Little Snow White,” which “dramatizes the essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster-woman” (36). The “demonic” creative woman must do battle with the docile Angel in the House, for the latter’s influence is harming the former:

Snow White represents precisely the ideal of “contemplative purity” . . . that could quite literally kill the Queen. An angel in the house of myth, Snow White is not only a child but (as female angels always are) childlike, docile, submissive . . . But the Queen, adult and demonic, plainly wants a life of “significant action,” by definition an “unfeminine” life of stories and story-

telling. And therefore, to the extent that Snow White, as her daughter, is a part of herself, she wants to kill the Snow White *in herself*, the angel who would keep deeds and dramas out of her house. (39)

This narrative pattern in which a creative woman considered “demonic” or “unfeminine” who must “kill the Snow White [or Angel in the House] *in herself*” is precisely the “battle” or conflict being played out within and between Maude and Agnes’s sonnets. In Agnes’s sonnet, female propriety is being threatened by this pressure to write, because writing is an act perceived as unfeminine and masculine. In Maude’s sonnet, it is female propriety that must be killed. Maude’s speaker kills it by pushing the Angel in the House—here the character of an old lady created by her, essentially “the Snow White *in herself*”—into a pond to drown.

Maude’s black humor in the birthday party sonnet is an ironic usage of melancholy as an “angel-killing” tool for self-protection, literary productivity, and transgression. But a more straightforward use of melancholy as a “weapon” against the Angel of the House appears in a poem she gives to her cousin Agnes to pass on to Miss Savage, who asked for some verses to be put in her album:

She sat and sang away  
By the green margin of a stream,  
Watching the fishes leap and play  
Beneath the glad sun-beam.

I sat and wept alway  
Beneath the moon's most shadowy beam,  
Watching the blossoms of the may  
Weep leaves into the stream.

I wept for memory;  
She sang for hope that is so fair;—  
My tears were swallowed by the sea;  
Her songs died on the air. (273–74)

The name of the recipient of this poem, Miss Savage, carries a hint of what Rossetti feels about the kind of person she represents: a stereotypical nineteenth-century middle-class young woman of conventional femininity. This characterization is further evidenced in the later tea-party scene where she implicitly excludes Maude from the normative by fussing over the latter's artistic interest, making Maude feel "attacked on either hand with questions concerning her verses" (279). In this poem, there are two women: one who "sang alway" (1) and sits in the sun, and the speaker who "wept alway" (5) and sits in "the moon's most shadowy beam" (6). They are possibly looking at the same stream, but the woman in the sun sees a bright, delightful scene whereas for the speaker the scene is one of "blossoms of the May / Weep leaves into the stream" (7-8), a vision that is a portent of lost youth or death. Theo Dombrowski notes that the antithesis of the second stanza creates contrast with the first, emphasizing the distance between the two ideals (71). Indeed, Winston Weathers reads

this poem as an illustration of a duality that cannot be reconciled, of two selves of the same person that “sit by the margin of the stream, but sit . . . in separation” (85). But it is the speaker’s vision that is proven right at the end, as both the speaker’s tears and the other woman’s song eventually disappear from the world, both sadness and happiness being shown to have no real meaning on an existential scale, a theme Maude will later on return to using her paraphrasing of Ecclesiastes. It is interesting that Maude has chosen this particular poem for Miss Savage, as if implying that her time, too, shall pass. Maude’s choice of a melancholic poem to give to Miss Savage (and Agnes) signals artistic depth, but Maude’s expression of melancholy through the poem is also a defense against the influence of the Angel in the House, or Victorian gender norms, on her work.

## **The Melancholy of the Nun**

Magdalen is a peer of Agnes and Mary, whom Maude becomes acquainted with at Mary’s birthday party in Part One. During this era, the notion of becoming a nun was a new possibility for Anglican women, as Tractarian leaders in 1845 established the first post-Reformation convent in England. It is important to bear in mind that a pervasive sense of the Victorian “Woman’s Mission,” as represented in the triptych by George Elgar Hicks of the same title, largely concerned caring for families—the subtitles of each painting being “Guide to Childhood,” “Companion of Manhood,” and “Comfort of Old Age” (Andres 29–30). For certain

religiously inclined, trained and educated “redundant women,” the Anglican sisterhoods offered a viable alternative life mission (Vicinus 46). Magdalen eventually takes holy orders to become an Anglican nun, and at one point suggests that this may be a possible vocation for Maude as well. In Chapter Three of Part Three, Maude asks Agnes a hypothetical question: “if you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three . . . would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?” (294). Maude is really asking herself this question: do I become a nun, a wife, or a writer? If Mary presents a successful example of a fledgling Angel in the House, Magdalen offers another path, that of “pale Sister Maude” (285) as Magdalen describes it to Agnes.

Magdalen is a central character in the story in terms of her presence in or behind the scenes. Readers are continuously informed of her off-stage progress as a nun, and Maude, on several occasions, muses upon Magdalen’s choice of vocation in a manner that suggests she considers it a viable option. It is highly probable that active Anglican sisterhoods, where service to God was expressed through the social gospel—as nurses, missionaries and teachers—would have been attractive for religious women with socially outgoing inclinations. Indeed, far from being a form of confinement, active convent orders in nineteenth-century England provided an alternative vocation for women who were more interested in religious contemplation or social service than matrimony and motherhood. Martha Vicinus states that Anglican orders for women “were one of the most important women’s communities in the nineteenth

century” in how they “empowered women, validating women’s work and values in a world that seemed materialistic, godless, and male” (83). In *Maude*, Magdalen is portrayed as a nun visibly working in the community. While her cousin Mary finds the idea repellent, Maude herself supposes that women who take holy orders are content in their choice: “I can perceive that those are very happy who are [nuns]” (275).

Therefore, Maude regards the life of a nun as an aspirational ideal, but with more ambivalence than in her repugnant attitude towards the Angel in the House. This skepticism is reflected in the important “Three Nuns” poems, a three-part lyric poem, which Maude designates as epithalamium despite the fact that it is not celebratory or discussing marriage. Instead, the poem consists of the internal thoughts of three nun characters with differing motives for joining the order. Within the text, Maude informs Agnes that the second nun stands for “Mary, had she mistaken her vocation” and “the third is Magdalen, of course” (287). While some critics may agree with Andrew and Catherine Belsey who read “Three Nuns” as an omnibus of three women mired in “the lack which is their tragic but chosen destiny, the deliberate construction of a place of non-being” (38), it would still be difficult to argue as to whether the nun in the third poem is so unhappy. In that section of “Three Nuns” that is inspired by Magdalen, the speaker contrasts the meagerness of the secular world with the heavenly reward that will come to God’s workers:

When Earth shall pass away with all

Her pride and pomp of sin,

The City builded without hands

Shall safely shut me in.

All the rest is but vanity

Which others strive to win:

Where their hopes end my joys begin. (3:36–42, 292)

D'Amico notes that Rossetti, through the third nun, is speaking of the Last Things, directly quoting Revelation 22:17 in the final line of the poem: “The Spirit and the Bride say, come” (3:84, 293; D'Amico 57). The Book of Revelation talks of the passing of all things on Earth and the coming of heaven, and about how the devout and wise shall inherit heaven on Earth. Consequently, the speaker is saying that the pursuit of all else is foolish vanity. Magdalen represents those who live lives of hope deferred for such future happiness.

However, despite her approval of the institution, Maude considers herself to be unfit for “such a life” and generally “too unwell for regularity” (275). There is a fleeting moment before her accident when she seems to seriously consider a religious vocation, asking aloud: “Mamma, should you mind my being a Nun?” (286). However, her mother dismisses this idea as if it were a passing fancy. In fact, Rossetti herself is thought to have considered, however briefly, taking orders as an Anglican nun; her older sister was a nun in the All Saints Sisterhood (Marsh 409) and there is some, if not definitive, evidence that Rossetti herself was an “outer sister” (D'Amico 44). She also had substantial experience working with nuns, being a volunteer at the Mary Magdalen

Penitentiary for Fallen Women on Highgate Hill for approximately a decade from the mid 1850s (Harrison 418). However, she seems to have rejected the vocation in a similar fashion as Mrs Foster had. Marsh quotes a letter from Rossetti to an acquaintance, where Rossetti says, “So you think I once trembled on ‘The Convent Threshold’? Not seriously ever, tho’ I went through a sort of romantic impression on the subject like many young people. No, I feel no drawing in that direction” (413). D’Amico also quotes from this letter in her examination of Rossetti and her thoughts concerning convent life, concluding that while Rossetti approved of the Anglican orders as a worthy, even superior alternative to a life of matrimony and motherhood, she herself felt no motivation to participate in it (66). It seems to require a particular sensibility for service and activity, as hinted at in Magdalen’s *Bout rimés* entry at Mary’s birthday party:

I fancy the good fairies dressed in white,  
Glancing like moon-beams through the shadows black;  
Without much work to do for king or hack.  
Training perhaps some twisted branch aright;  
Or sweeping faded Autumn leaves from sight  
To foster embryo life; or binding back  
Stray tendrils; or in ample bean-pod sack  
Bringing wild honey from the rocky height;  
Or fishing for a fly lest it should drown;  
Or teaching water-lily heads to swim,

Fearful that sudden rain might make them sink;  
Or dyeing the pale rose a warmer pink;  
Or wrapping lilies in their leafy gown,  
Yet letting the white peep beyond the rim.— (270)

Tess Cosslett notes that the poem is “dutifully spiritual” in both its otherworldly theme and the ministry of the fairies (131). Enjoubault observes that it is a better sonnet than Agnes’s in terms of its more regular adherence to meter and its more unified tone partly due to the alliteration of “f” sounds throughout (298). This perhaps reflects the steadiness or stability conferred by the religious selflessness—an outward vector from the ego through the aid of religiously proscribed activity and contemplation—exhibited by the fairies. Indeed, the overall tone of the sonnet is like a fairy story or fantasy, perhaps a reflection of how otherworldly the ideal Magdalen lives by is; the ideal, since otherworldly, is beyond the confines of the ego. The speaker in Magdalen’s poem aspires to be one of the “good fairies dressed in white” (1), like an angel carrying out God’s work on Earth. These fairies (or angels) do the unseen work of the world, straightening twisted branches (4), fostering “embryo life” into birth (6), saving drowning flies (9), or nursing “the pale rose a warmer pink” (12). All of these deeds can be read as metaphors for work undertaken by nuns or volunteers, such as nursing the sick, tending the young, or helping the needy. The sonnet is thus a catalog of the social work of religious persons. The volta—if it can be called one—comes in the last line, “letting the white peep beyond the rim” (14), a hint of the

white or pure virtue that the fairies or angels or nuns live by, hidden in the good works they do. The fairies do not have the kind of character readers would associate with Maude, and the sonnet itself is not one Maude would write herself. This is because it is the opposite of melancholic, as melancholy tends to be recursive or “inward” as opposed to the “outward” vector of active religious modes; this opposite vector of melancholy and the role of religion in its mechanism within Rossetti’s poetics shall be discussed further in Chapter Three. Meanwhile, the emotional distance between Magdalen’s and Maude’s sonnets can be seen as the distance between their characters. Maude is not like Magdalen, and, therefore, she cannot make the same choices.

A life of glad service is not what Maude wishes. What Maude really craves seems to be solitude, or, more specifically, an escape from the pressures of social performance. In the first section of “Three Nuns,” the one presumably based on Maude herself,<sup>6</sup> an unhappy nun feels dissatisfied with life within the convent walls and yearns to be a child again, playing freely by herself in the woods. The poem ends thus:

There, while yet a child,  
I thought I could live as in a dream,  
Secret, neither found nor sought:  
Till the lilies on the stream,  
Pure as virgin purity,

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<sup>6</sup> While Maude protests that “The first Nun no one can suspect of being myself” (287), Diane D’Amico notes that “her protests merely serve to draw attention to the similarity between her own world-weariness and that of the first nun,” effectively linking herself to that speaker (55).

Would seem scarce too pure for me: —

Ah, but that can never be. (289)

What Maude's speaker seeks in this return to childhood is "purity" (5), a state before she was defiled by the world, which she has tried to regain by entering the nunnery. Her failure implies Maude's awareness of the nun's profession as being unsuited for her needs, of not being able to provide her with the "purity" she seeks. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "purity" as "state or quality of being morally or spiritually pure; sinlessness; freedom from ritual pollution; ceremonial cleanness; innocence; chastity" ("Purity"). In the context of the story, this purity of "sinlessness" may be interpreted as Maude's state before her discovery of the vanity of asserted melancholy, relating to a time when she was innocent of "display and poetry and acting" (273).

Indeed, the nun in Maude's section of "Three Nuns" hints at an escape from performance that has failed to result in the succor she seeks:

When my yellow hair was curled

Though men saw and called me fair,

I was weary in the world

Full of vanity and care.

Gold was left behind, curls shorn

When I came here; that same morn

Made a bride no gems adorn.

Here wrapped in my spotless veil,

Curtained from intruding eyes,  
I whom prayers and fasts turn pale  
Wait the flush of Paradise.  
But the vigil is so long  
My heart sickens:— sing thy song,  
Blithe bird that canst do no wrong. (1:22–42, 288–89)

The nun's declaration of the weariness of performance—"I was weary in the world / Full of vanity and care" (3–4)—is followed by an account of an escape into the holy orders, and now she is "Curtained from intruding eyes" (9) or the need to perform a character. "Character" here is Riede's usage of the word, a form of internalized social conscience in the form of a limiting, policing persona, an "introjection of the hegemonic cultural values of the age" (7). The nun in this section discovers, however, that she is still performing a character; she is trying to conform to the character of a religious exemplar, "wrapped in my spotless veil" (8) or maintaining a certain appearance, and participating in "prayers and fasts" (10) in order to forget her life outside of the convent. In other words, she has only escaped one character only to entrap herself in another. The "Blithe bird that canst do no wrong" can do no wrong because, as an animal, it is free from the motive of performance. Similarly, a child playing alone in the woods is innocent of any pressure to perform or be a character. Maude is, therefore, aware that convent life will not enable her happiness. She intuits that being a nun would be as confining as being an Angel in the House. While she uses melancholy as a "weapon" to "kill" the Angel in

the House, in “Three Nuns,” she uses it to illuminate the performance aspects of religious service in order to think through the consequences of choosing and rejecting a conventual life.

# **Chapter Two: Ecclesiastes and the Productivity of Vanity**

## **Melancholy and the Sin of Vanity**

Maude resists the pressures to conform to the “Victorian sense of the finite socially constructed ‘character’” (Riede 8)—again, the “characters” here being the Angel in the House and the nun—by asserting her identity and legitimacy as a writer through signaling her melancholy in her poetry. However, despite her artistic satisfaction from writing such verses, it seems that Maude feels guilt over her literary expressions of melancholy. In Chapter Three of Part One, she remarks: “How I envy you . . . you who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am sick of display and poetry and acting” (273). This brief remark reveals that Maude thinks of her work as engaging in mendacious “display” and “acting.” Beyond this comment, Maude’s guilt is further articulated in Chapter III of Part Two, where Agnes discovers Maude to be suffering from feelings of religious unworthiness due to her writing. Maude even declares to Agnes that she will not take the Eucharist the next day during Christmas services, and stops her cousin from admonishing her: “Whatever your faults may be . . . you are trying to correct them; your own conscience tells you that. But I am not trying. No one will say that I cannot avoid putting myself forward and displaying my verses” (282). She believes that, if she were more moral, she would not show her writing to anyone (or perhaps let others

know she writes at all).

Gilbert and Gubar, in explaining Maude's reluctance and guilt, note: "here is the worst, the most unforgivable sin, the ultimate female sin of vanity. Whether literally or figuratively, a woman must never become enamored of her own image in nature or art" (552). Maude clearly regards her allowing of the circulation of her verses to be an act of vanity. The word "vanity" is key, as its Judeo-Christian connotations relate to the spiritual dimensions of Maude's agony, and to her subsequent feelings of guilt. Here, the word "vanity" refers to "[the] quality of being personally vain; high opinion of oneself; self-conceit and desire for admiration," but can also refer to "[that] which is vain, futile, or worthless; that which is of no value or profit" ("Vanity"). Vanity in *Maude* appears to be a combination of both, as the composition of poetry for the admiration of others is considered a "futile" act, because such selfishness and inflated sense of self-importance traps Maude within her own prideful ego and distances her from God. Rossetti's own conception of melancholy hints at why Maude may feel the display of melancholy or the poetic persona to be so problematic. Roe contends that while Rossetti considered melancholy to be a "stylistic choice," she differed with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in their reverence of Keats' melancholy because she was more ambivalent about utilizing melancholy in her own work, as it conflicted with her religious asceticism (42). Gilbert and Gubar also contrast Rossetti's attitude towards being an artist with Keats's, asserting that Rossetti's negative "consideration of 'vanity'" was fundamental to

her self-conception as “a fragile, vainly costumed lady,” while Keats was imbued with the “masculine certainty” of being “a lord of creation” (553). Therefore, it is possible to read Maude’s guilt, which is yet another aspect of Maude’s melancholy, as resulting from the clash between her assertions of artistry and Victorian religious norms.

The term “vanity” is prominently featured in the two sonnets that come just before the conversation with Agnes mentioned above, and these two sonnets illuminate Maude’s conflict between her desire to be an artist and her identity as a devout Christian. Maude has written these sonnets to express the guilt she feels concerning her “vanity,” or her display of literary ambition. The first of these sonnets that Maude shows Agnes is a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes:

Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith,  
All things are vanity. The eye and ear  
Cannot be filled with what they see and hear:  
Like early dew, or like the sudden breath  
Of wind, or like the grass that withereth  
Is man, tossed to and fro by hope and fear:  
So little joy hath he, so little cheer,  
Till all things end in the long dust of death.  
Today is still the same as yesterday,  
To-Morrow also even as one of them;  
And there is nothing new under the sun.  
Until the ancient race of time be run

The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem,

And morning shall be cold and twilight grey.— (280)

Paraphrase of the scriptures was one of the methods nineteenth-century women writers used to interpret and meditate upon theological themes (Landow 22; Taylor 12). This melancholic poem is about the existential angst of having no escape from the inevitability of death on Earth. Ludlow contextualizes the poem's melancholy within the point of Maude's narrative, locating the speaker in "the place of uphill struggle rather than at the peak of a grace-inflected understanding" (66); therefore, it is a poem representing the conflict itself, and not its resolution. It is relentless with intertextual references to Ecclesiastes, most notably the first line of the sonnet with the second verse of the book: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity" (Ecc. 1.2). It is clear that Maude intended for readers to pick up the allusion and incorporate its meaning into the story. Ecclesiastes is a book of the Bible that explores the meaning of life. In the end, it determines that, while wisdom is laudable, it is not eternal, and suggests humans should live pious lives enjoying the gifts of God and keeping the commandments. It is also a melancholic work, for as Maude's sonnet suggests, it talks about how everything must end, including nature and humanity itself. Concomitantly, "there is nothing new under the sun" (11), which is a rephrasing of "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun" (1.14). This reference in particular seems to be pointing to a thematically relevant feature of Ecclesiastes, towards a melancholic passage on the worthlessness of wisdom:

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. [. . .] For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. (1.13–14; 1.18)

At the end of wisdom there is only grief, and any attempt at wisdom is nothing more than “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Through her pointed allusions to Ecclesiastes, and her presentation of this sonnet to Agnes while simultaneously castigating herself for putting herself forward and displaying her verses, Maude is indirectly declaring that her poetry writing is an act of vanity. Her work has been nothing more than “old thorns” that are “growing out of the old stem” (13), not even procreative flowers but sterile thorns, pointing to her belief that her work is futile.

There is, however, a possibility that this sonnet is more than simply a depiction of futility in this world, but is also a message of hope. The surface voice of the poem may be melancholic, but the underlying voice is one of resolute control and persistence, again, because of the exacting form. As discussed in the previous chapter, Keble approved of the sonnet form because of its poetic utility for modulating emotion; the melancholy of the poem is present, but contained by the measured meter and rhyme. There is an overall iambic pentameter, accentuated by spondaic feet in key melancholic images such as “long dust” (8), “old

thorns” (13) or “old stem” (13). This controlled use of the sonnet form indicates that underneath the melancholy and existential despair is a speaker in control of her emotion.

A sense of artistic control can also be detected in the complex intertextual elements of the sonnet. Maude seems to be incorporating the existential theme of Ecclesiastes with the lines “all things end in the long dust of death” (8), which reminds readers that eventually we shall all perish. However, Diane D’Amico demonstrates that this particular poem, while mostly based on the voice of the preacher in Ecclesiastes, also “weaves various biblical texts together to convey her own message” (26)—such as First Corinthians, the Psalms, and Revelations—in order to link her poem with scripture (27). While D’Amico mentions lines 2–3 as referencing the St Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man”; 1 Cor. 2.9; D’Amico 27), the twelfth line, “the ancient race of time be run,” also notably echoes the same book of the Bible:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things . . . But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9.24–27)

Maude has deliberately directed the reader to these particular verses, and so the reason why bears examination. A clue is the word “temperate,”

which contrasts from the gloom, or possible rage, of the existential melancholy of Ecclesiastes and “Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith.” The First Corinthians verses pertain to self-control, and the need to maintain a state of being “temperate” or to “keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” lest one becomes a “castaway.” The precise form of Maude’s sonnet possibly alludes to this sense of control described in First Corinthians. Therefore, encoded within the melancholy, is a voice of faith that keeps to formalities and practices, or exactly what she has “preached to others.” Thus, the discipline required to compete in a race could mean both her religiously prescriptive poetry and her scriptural “preaching” by which she exhorts others to live by.

The second sonnet she shows Agnes extends this underlying prescriptive theme. It, too, on the surface is a narrative of the spiritual transcendence denied to the speaker, with some lines of self-condemnation at the end:

I listen to the holy antheming  
That riseth in thy walls continually,  
What while the organ pealeth solemnly  
And white-robed men and boys stand up to sing.  
I ask my heart with a sad questioning:  
‘What lov’st thou here?’ and my heart answers me:  
‘Within the shadows of this sanctuary  
To watch and pray is a most blessed thing.’  
To watch and pray, false heart? it is not so:

Vanity enters with thee, and thy love  
Soars not to Heaven, but grovelleth below.  
Vanity keepeth guard, lest good should reach  
Thy hardness; not the echoes from above  
Can rule thy stubborn feelings or can teach. — (281)

The sestet beginning with the volta at line nine gives us a self-condemnation of her vanity, that her “false heart” makes her “grovelleth” for attention and approbation in the secular world as opposed to letting her soar into heaven. This image of soaring, of movement outward, recalls Isobel Armstrong’s comments about Victorian expressive theory: “Expansion, movement outwards, the breaking of barriers, is the essence of poetry and the essence of *healthy* poetry” (340). “Soars” is notable in such imagery of outward movement, of a “healthy” speaker. It is contrasted against the speaker’s immobility as implied by “the shadows of this sanctuary” (7), which may be within a church but for the word “shadows” conjuring a place of solitary enclosure, and being “below” (12) where “Vanity keepeth guard” (13) as if a jailer to a cell. The speaker is prevented from moving out of this cell and into heaven, and trapped due to her vanity within the prison of her ego. Armstrong paraphrases Arthur Hallam (1811–1833) by saying, “the movement outwards into ‘energetic love for the beautiful’ was a moral activity because it educated the self in a liberation from the bonds of the ego” (360). In this sonnet, the sin of vanity prevents the speaker from engaging in the “moral activity” of moving outwards from the ego.

Similar imagery of “movement outwards” can be read from Maude’s other melancholic poetry, such as in the following poem written after her accident:

Then in my wrath I broke the bough  
That I had tended with such care,  
Hoping its scent should fill the air:  
I crushed the eggs, not heeding how  
Their ancient promise had been fair: —  
I would have vengeance now. (13–18, 295)

The desire for movement outward, or freedom, is embedded in the line: “Hoping its scent should fill the air” (15) in the image of the scent diffusing into the air. The eggs also reflect this desire as they had “ancient promise” (17) to hatch into birds and fly into the air, not to mention the connotations in eggs of creativity and growth.

Agnes asks whether the sonnet “I listen to the holy antheming” was composed after attending a service at St Andrew’s, which readers understand to be a High Anglican cathedral. Maude had previously introduced its services as “a perfect service; or at any rate perhaps the nearest English approach to vocal perfection” (275). Maude admits later on to Agnes that she had been going to St Andrews at the cost of neglecting her own parish church, presumably because she was enraptured by the sensuous music. Elsewhere in the novella, religious music is seen to have a significantly positive effect on Maude. At Mrs Strawdy’s tea party, her only enjoyment is Caroline’s singing of some simple and

religious airs for the group: “Maude felt consoled for all the contrarities of the day” (279). These incidents and the sonnet above suggest that music has the power to help Maude transcend her self and move outside of her ego towards freedom; it should also be noted that under Armstrong’s expressive theory, music enables escape from different confines of the ego: “Music, or the ‘air,’ literally circulates in and between the group and the congregation, canceling the fixities of gender and social division and releasing the stony categories from their rigidity . . . expressive song reconfigures relationships” (339). The religious aspect of the music suggests that Maude’s ideal of freedom is spiritual—a freedom of the soul. In other words, it is a freedom from the mortality of the body, and, thus, from earthly matters.

Maude perceives her poetry as keeping her from the freedom of heaven; yet, she is unable to sacrifice it. She interprets her inability to mortify her literary ambitions as deeply engrained vanity, as opposed to a legitimate desire for artistic expression and identification. As a compromise between her worldly ambitions and religion, she declares that she will not receive the Eucharist so that she is not a hypocrite. Agnes subsequently accuses Maude of going against her religious duties when she questions, “You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause; that you will take your fill of pleasure” (283). Agnes is, in effect, voicing Maude’s fear and reason for her guilt, that her poetry is precisely an act of indulging in “vanity and display.” Maude’s reaction is to reiterate her

position and burst into tears until she is left alone, for she cannot recant her decision. She is at an impasse; she cannot give up her art for her religion, nor can she give up her religion for her art.

Maude's choice to forego the Eucharist is, on the surface, a pious action, a refusal to "not profane Holy Things" (281). Underneath however, the decision is also an indication of her will to preserve her artistic persona. She will not abandon her writing or being a poet; she would rather give up the Eucharist. This decision is an expression of her artistic agency, an agency that is, at this stage, in direct conflict with her religious values. Later on, Maude (and Rossetti herself) will find a way to better accommodate the poetics of melancholy into her religious principles, but, until Part Two, we are given a portrait of the artist as a young woman who is struggling to integrate her creative desire with the cultural expectations of female modesty and self-denial.

It is appropriate that Part Two ends with this decision and the original hymn "Thank God, thank God, we do believe" written by Rossetti herself (477). Maude has been sobbing over her difficult decision, and, when the clock strikes twelve to announce Christmas Day, the waits (carolers) outside begin to sing this hymn, and it eventually lulls Maude to slumber. Evidently, music still has the power of transport for Maude, and, because she falls asleep comforted rather than tortured by the content of the lyrics, readers understand that the hymn functions not as admonishment but consolation. The content of the lyrics are simple, a rejoicing at the coming of Christ. Significantly, with forty lines, this hymn

is the longest single poem to be included in “Maude” (“Three Nuns,” while longer, is more of a sequence of poems). The novella presents the entire hymn, as if encouraging readers to experience for themselves the devotional song’s quieting influence on Maude. The effect is the lulling of an atmosphere that has been previously overwrought by Maude’s “selfish” declarations to Agnes, and the subsequent emotional release of tears. It is as if Rossetti, by inserting a complete hymn of her own making—instead of using an established hymn, or simply mentioning the Christmas waits singing outside—consoles her own heroine in an act of mercy and understanding.

The consoling nature of the hymn is, in fact, a common feature of the form. J. R. Watson states that hymns are notable for their regular rhythmic structure, and their patterns are, in many ways, more creatively enabling than being restrictive, allowing the hymn composer to “use the stress patterns of the tune and meter to provide a strong base, on which they build in subtle and sensitive ways” (25). This feature is similar to the central idea of this thesis, in which deliberate control enables the modulation and calibration of affective powers to productive effect. Further illumination may be gained from Blair’s argument that, in the Victorian era, “the poetic form” was “shorthand for the poet’s beliefs and allegiance” (10). In other words, the level of adherence to form corresponded to the level of adherence to religious faith, that the more regular the meter, the more regular the faith. Additionally, in *Maude*, the hymn also represents the faith of the community—it is, literally, sung by a

community—and Maude finds herself both distanced from and yet yearning for it. The words “Let us kneel down with one accord / And render thanks unto the Lord” (284; 35–36) at the end of the hymn are prescriptive, giving Maude an external vector to escape the bounds of her ego, which enables her to fall asleep. Thus, coupled with her response to the religious music played at Mrs Strawdy’s tea party, the effect of the hymn is a foreshadow of the solution to Maude’s dilemma.

This poem is also distinguished from the other verses in the story by the fact that it is a hymn. There are certain formal implications to this fact. As a hymn, it is written in the long meter hymn form of iambic tetrameters (eight syllables per line to be matched with an appropriate melody) with an *aabb* rhyme scheme (“Common measure”). The iambic tetrameter of the long measure has less tension and is, consequently, more soothing than the more popular form of common measure, which consists of alternating iambic tetrameters and trimeters and an *abab* rhyme scheme. Both the meter and the rhyme scheme of the long measure contribute to its stability, which is consequently soothing to the reader. The long-meter iambic tetrameter hymn form is more symmetrical and stable than the iambic tetrameter-trimeter common meter one, as the rhythmic tension of the former is completed in two lines (couplets). In contrast, common meter hymns require four lines (quatrains) to create an even number of feet (seven feet producing fourteen beats) in order to resolve the rhythmic tension brought on by the “missing” foot at the end of the first trimeter:

When I am dead, my dearest,

Sing no sad songs for me;  
Plant thou no roses at my head,  
Nor shady cypress tree: (“Song,” 1–4, 52)

The above example demonstrates how in a hymnic stanza, the iambic tetrameter-trimeter combination creates tension in the rhythm by a feeling of an absence of a foot at the end of the trimeter, and requires at least a quatrain to resolve the arc of tension created by the meter and the rhyme. In contrast, the iambic tetrameter, being more stable, requires only two lines to stand alone in a couplet:

Thank God, thank God, we do believe;  
Thank God that this is Christmas Eve. (1–2, 283)

Its stability is aided by the *aabb* couplet rhyme scheme, which requires only two lines for resolution, while an *abab* rhyme scheme requires four (or in other cases more than just one quatrain, if the rhyme scheme was, for example, *abcb*, another popular variant of the common measure). Long meter is, overall, a structure that swiftly resolves tension within the space of a couplet instead of extending it over the length of a quatrain. This constant feeling of light tension being resolved over the course of twenty couplets, as in the case of “Thank God, thank God, we do believe,” consequently has a soothing effect on the listener.

Aside from these formal implications, the fact that the hymn is being sung on Christmas Eve brings out another meaning from its otherwise simple lyrics:

‘Let us kneel down with one accord

And render thanks unto the Lord:

For unto us a Child is born

Upon this happy Christmas morn;

For unto us a Son is given,

Firstborn of God and Heir of Heaven.'— (35–40, 284)

The content of the hymn is of rejoicing upon the nativity of Christ, which is appropriate considering that the time in which it is sung within the story is “Christmas morn” (38). Immediately prior to the hymn, Maude had effectively turned herself away from Christ, as she vowed to refuse the Eucharist during Christmas services. The Tractarians viewed “the presence of Christ within the Eucharist as a real, objective presence and not merely a figurative one” (Hill 457), attesting to the importance of the Eucharist within the doctrine. By turning away from the Eucharist, or the presence of God, her eternal soul, which Maude as a Christian associates with her sense of the infinite self, is thus contracted and prevented from moving outward. The hymn, however, sings of the incarnational coming of Emmanuel (“God with us”) and, therefore, of the bridging of the distance between people on Earth and God. Maude’s melancholy here springs from her feelings of division from God, and it is poetry, specifically in the Tractarian privileged form of the hymn, that assuages Maude’s melancholic feelings about being divided or cut off from God with the message of the coming of Christ and its implied reconciliation with God.

## **“A Testimony”: The Productivity of Vanity**

Rossetti was preoccupied with the relationship between vanity and melancholic performance for the duration of her writing career. As Serena Trowbridge has demonstrated, Rossetti used Ecclesiastes as a theme or reference to explore this dilemma in many poems of her oeuvre (63). Especially to the young Rossetti contemplating a literary life at the time of writing *Maude*, the appeal of Ecclesiastes as a guiding text would have been obvious. The attraction of Ecclesiastes lies in how it manages to be both a productively melancholic voice and a religious one at the same time. It is one that works through the different possible goals of life (fame, riches, learning and so on) in order to examine and discard them. This process would have engaged a poetically inclined young person in the process of considering, rejecting, and accepting the different kinds of “characters” or available social roles. In many ways, Ecclesiastes may be viewed as a prototypical melancholic voice of the Judeo-Christian world, preceded by the Stoics or other classical thinkers such as Aristotle, but having greater influence in nineteenth-century England owing to its inclusion in the wide-reaching authorized Bible. Thus, the voice would have been sanctified within the religious traditions of her society, as well as being creatively potent at the same time.

One poem that illuminates Rossetti’s use of Ecclesiastes and helps us think about melancholy and literary productivity is “A Testimony.” It was included in her first collection *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, and is one of the earliest examples of Rossetti using Ecclesiastes to think

through the implications of her work and religion. From beginning to end, this poem is replete with references to Ecclesiastes, inviting readers to make the connection between the themes of the biblical book with the poem itself:

I said of laughter, it is vain.

Of mirth I said, what profits it?

Therefore I found a book, and writ

Therein how ease and also pain,

How health and sickness, everyone

Is vanity beneath the sun. (1-6)

The “book” (3) in question, of course, is Ecclesiastes, and we are listening to the voice of its author. Ecclesiastes itself does not start off with a critique of laughter or mirth; the first mention of a specific, meaningless human activity is labor: “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (1.3). Rossetti does not keep this order, however, perhaps because she is intent in “rewriting” Ecclesiastes to better suit her circumstances; for instance, middle-class women had limited possibilities for labor in the nineteenth century. By beginning with a critique of mirth, Rossetti can embark on reworking a version of Ecclesiastes that is more specific to her own ideas and concerns while still benefitting from the intertextual richness of appropriating the Biblical text. She does, however, comment on the nature of labor in a subsequent stanza:

We build our houses on the sand,

Comely withoutside and within;

But when the winds and rains begin  
To beat on them, they cannot stand;  
They perish, quickly overthrown,  
Loose from the very basement stone. (19-24)

This stanza references a parable in Matthew Chapter 7, particularly the house of a “wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matt. 7.24), and that of “a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (Matt. 7.26). The verses deal with those who listen to God’s words and those who do not, and Rossetti’s appropriation of them dovetails with the theme of biblical paraphrasing and Ecclesiastes’s prescriptive guidance. The choice of house-building for commentary on labor is notable for the combination of men’s labor (building) and the domestic or feminine implication of the physical home. Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* has pointed out that domestic fiction written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to enclose conflict within the gendered domestic sphere in order to suggest the power of virtue in larger conflicts, such as that in between “an agrarian gentry and urban industrialists, for one, or between labor and capital” (48). The “winds and rain” (21) stand in for both the physical forces that beat against the fruits of our best labor and the societal forces that conspire to bring down our carefully managed homes. Domestic virtue is like the strength of a house against the elements; it, too, shall perish in the end.

The following two stanzas near the end of the poem gives readers a hint of salvation and perhaps reveals the inherent productivity of

melancholy:

He who hath little shall not lack;

He who hath plenty shall decay:

Our fathers went; we pass away;

Our children follow on our track:

So generations fail, and so

They are renewed and come and go.

The earth is fattened with our dead;

She swallows more and doth not cease:

Therefore her wine and oil increase

And her sheaves are not numberèd;

Therefore her plants are green, and all

Her pleasant trees lusty and tall. (55-66)

Lines 55–56 are paraphrases of Proverbs (28.27): “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.” Such utilization continues the combination of prescriptive theme and paraphrasing form. While “generations fail” (59) they are at the same time “renewed” (60). This can be interpreted as a comment on the futility of the generations, but also at the same time can be construed as the opposite, that with every generation that passes will come a new one. And while we die, “The earth is fattened with our dead” (61) to create more “wine and oil” (63) and numerous “sheaves” (64), green plants, and “pleasant trees” that are “lusty and tall” (66). As meaningless as our lives are, we and by

extension our labors are put into the creation of something beautiful.

This is an attitude encouraged even within Ecclesiastes itself: “Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God” (5.19). Keble in a sermon on Ecclesiastes Chapters Seven and Eight also brings forth a message of hope contained within the melancholy of the book: “For, ‘whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do,’ if we ‘do all to the glory of God,’ we shall do it with His blessing and approbation: it will be so much more of happiness, joy, and thanksgiving to us” (“Festival Joy”). This reading of Ecclesiastes as a message “to enjoy, with innocence, moderation, and thankfulness, the daily comforts and reliefs” (“Festival Joy”) was probably known to her. Accordingly, she may have interpreted Ecclesiastes’s words “rejoice in his labour” as a call to write, to create work that would enrich the world even after she has left it, and to rejoice in the fruits of that work. Thus, while the author of Ecclesiastes is careful to end with a reiteration of the fundamental futility of earthly human pursuits, he leaves in the middle of the text enough space for satisfaction in life, and perhaps even joy. By using a similar strategy in embedding the “wine and oil” (63), innumerable “sheaves” (64), and “pleasant trees” (65) in the third-to-last stanza of “A Testimony,” Rossetti may be alluding to this hidden message of Ecclesiastes, that at the end of all this productive melancholy is a hope for salvation and meaning.

## Chapter Three: The Poetics of Tractarian

### Reserve

#### Christina Rossetti and the Poetics of Reserve

If, as I have sought to demonstrate, Maude's navigation between her literary ambitions and external social pressures were aided by the poetics of melancholy, Maude's reconciliation between her creative impulse and religious ideals is made possible through Keble's Tractarian poetics. As such, it is necessary to examine the more specific mechanics of these poetics to discern Maude's (and Rossetti's) use of them in the development of a voice that complements or subsumes the poetics of melancholy for creatively productive ends. Critics assert that Rossetti was aware of Keble's ideas on the expressive mechanism of poetry, and that it had significant influence upon her work (Arseneau 71; Francis 118; Marsh 56; Tennyson 198). Arseneau, in particular, focuses on *Maude* to illustrate how Rossetti internalized Keble's Tractarian poetics—which Arseneau designates as the “poetics of reserve”—to develop her authorial voice of “reticence, secrecy, mystery, renunciation, modesty, and detachment” (67). Arseneau also argues that Maude, by utilizing such poetics of reserve, is able to reconcile the conflicting demands of her art and religion by imbuing spiritual meaning to her poetic impulse (94). In other words, Arseneau understands Maude's melancholy as a form of affectation and a manifestation of religious guilt that is overcome through the adoption of a poetics of reserve, or through the utilization of a religiously approved

creative strategy that validates the devout poet's professional identity. This religiously restorative reading highlights the previously neglected and indisputably crucial role of Tractarian poetics in Rossetti's productivity as a literary artist. One of the continuing arguments concerning Rossetti's Tractarian poetics of reserve from Tennyson to Arseneau to Francis has been the importance of understanding Rossetti's religious motives and background in analyzing her poetic vision.

However, focusing on the religious aspect of Tractarian poetics runs the danger of reducing Rossetti's beliefs to the status of an obstacle that had to be overcome before the poet could validate her calling. Such a reduction would belittle the innovative psychologizing behind the Tractarian poetics of reserve and its productive implications for scholars and artists alike. Therefore, the creative mechanics of Rossetti's Tractarian poetics need to be considered in tandem with her religious code, in order to appreciate the productivity of the poetics of reserve beyond its socially validating utility.

## **The Mechanics of Tractarian Reserve**

The poetics of reserve, rooted in Keble's ideas of poetry, largely involves the control or harnessing of emotions towards an eventual, desired release. Blair summarizes the mechanics of Tractarian poetics as follows:

The favourite metaphor for the function of forms in High Church writing is a channel . . . in relation to the management of emotion,

“channels” also suggests that rather than simply blocking the current of thoughts and feelings, forms allow them to be contained in a manageable and orderly way. Religious feeling is still intense, but this channelling suggests calm waters rather than turbulence, a steady, even flow rather than bursts or gushes of feeling. (32)

Blair suggests that such forms are necessarily “premised on *rhythmic*—even metrical—structures” (35), emphasizing the importance of repetitive, patterned form in the work of the Tractarian poets.

Continuing Arseneau’s inquiry into the more specific mechanics of the poetics of reserve, Francis has noted the similarities of Keble’s poetics with Romanticism, specifically of Wordsworthian spontaneous overflow. However, she perceives a key difference in the way Keble, while acknowledging that emotions are “natural,” also asserts that the instinct to repress these emotions is also natural (119). Keble states that poetry enables a solution whereby these conflicting urges to express and repress can be effectively controlled and calibrated to bring relief:

Poetry is the indirect expression in words, most appropriately in metrical words, of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence of which is somehow repressed . . . the conventional rules of metre and rhythm may evidently have the effect of determining in some one direction, the overflow of sentiment and expression, wherewith the mind might otherwise be oppressed . . . the rules may be no less useful, in throwing a kind

of veil over those strong and deep emotions, which need relief,  
but cannot endure publicity. (qtd. in Francis 119)

Poetry, by giving a way to control and express “the overflow of sentiment and expression,” has a therapeutic effect on the poet. The *Lyra Apostolica*, a collection of verse by some of the most prominent Tractarian poets and a key stylistic text of the movement, also attest to such a therapeutic effect, as evidenced by the many titles bearing the names of emotions—one sequence by Newman titled “Shame,” “Bondage,” “Terror,” and “Restlessness”—and the poems themselves using controlled form and religious imagery to both enervate yet express, in a calibrated manner, the emotion. In the sequence “Vanity of Vanities,” the first sonnet “Sovereignty of Spirit” seems to describe this process of the emotions being expressed in a controlled manner towards ultimate relief:

They do but grope in learning’s pedant round,  
Who on the fantasies of sense bestow  
An idol substance, bidding us bow low  
Before those shades of being which are found  
Stirring or still on man’s brief trial ground;  
As if such shapes and moods, which come and go,  
Had aught of Truth or Life in their poor show,  
To sway or judge, and skill to sain or wound.  
Son of immortal seed, high destined Man!  
Know thy dread gift,—a creature, yet a cause;  
Each mind is its own centre, and it draws

Home to itself, and moulds in its thought's span

All outward things, the vassals of its will,

Aided by Heaven, by earth unthwarted still. (Newman 48)

The epigraph of this sonnet—"Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain"—is from the Book of Common Prayer, in a section regarding funereal rites. The "vain shadow" is what the "fantasies of sense" (2) or the "shapes and moods, which come and go" (6) refer to, in other words the futile activities we engage in during our mortal lifetimes; the words "sense" and "moods" in particular recall the emotions, ones that make "Man . . . disquieteth himself in vain." Along with these emotions that keep us in thrall or "bidding us bow low" (3) are "learning's pedant round" (1), the speaker decrying the vain intellectualism also described in Ecclesiastes: "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit" (Ecc. 17). The title of the sequence itself, "Vanity of Vanities," is clearly a reference to Ecclesiastes, as with Maude's poem "Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith." "Sovereignty of Spirit" therefore has the same skepticism of the "madness" and "vexation of spirit" in Ecclesiastes. The speaker bids the reader, in the sestet, to "Know thy dread gift" (10) of being able to mold the things they can perceive to their will, and that will must be "Aided by Heaven" (14)—through religious, probably ritualistic methods—in order to be "unthwarted" (14) by anything on Earth. The spirit is sovereign, therefore able to control itself, with the aid of God.

This control is formally reflected in the Petrarchan sonnet form of the poem, which is the Tractarians' preferred mode of the sonnet. The other poems of *Lyra Apostolica* are also mostly Petrarchan sonnets or in common meter, forms that allow for both the expression and repression of affect. Such control and regulation should not be seen as outright repression, but as a method of inverse, therapeutic expression. This therapeutic effect and idea of expression through repression recalls Isobel Armstrong's expressive theory of Victorian women poets; indeed, Armstrong singles out Tractarian aesthetics in her own analysis of nineteenth-century women's poetry:

The problem is accentuated for Tractarian aesthetics by the theological necessity of a due "reserve," a refusal to bring forth an excess of feeling and an assent to hidden meaning. Keble's theory of the symbol speaks of the *concealing* as well as the *revealing* nature of symbol . . . since the representational symbol is both the *means* of expression and the *form* of its repression, expression and repression, although in conflict with one another, becomes interdependent. (341)

To both Keble and Armstrong, "repression" is not a negation of "expression" but a way of exerting artistic agency over one's emotions in a healthy and productive manner.

But what does it mean, in practice, to "control" or "reserve" one's emotions in writing poetry, and how is therapeutic repression and harmful repression to be distinguished? Under the poetics of reserve, what is the

specific mechanism of repression that an artist may adopt to serve ultimately expressive and sustainably productive ends? The key to discerning the “expressiveness” of literary control may be in determining the speaker’s poetic vector, namely the “movement outwards” as observed in the poems examined in the previous chapter of this thesis. Armstrong states, “The movement outwards, the breaking of barriers, is the essence of poetry and the essence of *healthy* poetry” (340); it is noteworthy that Keble also uses metaphors of physical sensation and health when describing the effect of poetry, that it “gives healing relief to secret mental emotion” (qtd. in Francis 119). In the previous chapter, it has been noted that such “movement outwards” from the ego implies the soul’s reaching for heaven, and, therefore, the spiritual health of the speaker.

This connection between isolation and melancholy is true to an extent in *Maude*. While Maude is depicted as being surrounded by family and friends, she is seen to deliberately withdraw, usually to write or to think (for example, she confines herself to her room after putting up Christmas decorations in Chapter Three of Part Two, and is discovered by Agnes to be writing). Moreover, she is at odds with the expectations of her community. As discussed in the first chapter, Maude is not as integrated with her society’s mores as Mary or Agnes. Indeed, the narrator also makes this very distinction clear in a direct comparison between Maude and Mary:

The two made a strong contrast: one was occupied by a thousand shifting thoughts of herself, her friends, her plans, what she must

do, and what she would do; the other, whatever might employ her tongue, and to a certain extent her mind, had always an under-current of thought intent upon herself. (267–68).

Mary's preoccupation with her friends, plans, activities, and expectations gives readers the impression that she is an active and willing participant in her surroundings. Maude, however, is more concerned with what she will or should say in particular situations, and has "always an under-current of thought upon herself;" she has, in other words, a psychological tendency to stay within the bounds of her inner creative world. Elsewhere in the novella, Mary is further described as socially vivacious and healthy, while Maude, over the course of the narrative, is frequently understood by other characters to be unwell, and consequently socially reclusive. Maude also becomes more melancholic after her accident when her physical condition confines her to her sofa, cutting her off from productive society, as symbolized by her inability to attend Mary's wedding (the wedding itself, in contrast to Maude's couch, being a synecdoche of Mary's full integration into society).

The only way for Maude to escape the essential melancholy of her bedridden state, and rise above wallowing in what confines her to traversing her barriers, is through "movement outwards" in her poetry. The narrator deliberately discloses the sequence of the last three poems written in Maude's life. These are: "Sleep, Let Me Sleep, for I Am Sick of Care," "Fade, Tender Lily," and "What Is It Jesus Saith unto the Soul." Taken in this order, the poems form a triptych that can be read

thematically as poems of resurrection and rebirth. Readers can follow Maude poetically engaging in a “movement outwards” from the confines of melancholy to the promise of salvation that lies beyond the cares of the self:

Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care;  
Sleep, let me sleep, for my pain wearies me.  
Shut out the light; thicken the heavy air  
With drowsy incense; let a distant stream  
Of music lull me, languid as a dream,  
Soft as the whisper of a Summer sea. (1–6, 296–97)

This poem is “dated ten days after Maude’s accident” (296), a period in which she would have been the most depressed; the dragging feeling from the spondees “me sleep” (1,2), “my pain” (2), and “Shut out” (3) is a hint of this laggardness. This dragging gives way to the lighter iambic meter as the speaker moves on to images of streaming incense, music, dreams, and the whispers of the sea. “Sleep” (1) can be read as death (or ultimate rest), or the sleep before final judgment.

Brad Sullivan asserts that the images in this poem are of “weariness, hopelessness, and unfulfilled longing,” that no redemption is promised in its theme of the cyclical nature of growth and death (227). However, Dolores Rosenblum focuses on the poem’s “degree of technical control,” which diametrically contrasts with the theme of “a woman’s will-less participation in the natural cycle of fruition and decay” (18). While this sense of control can clearly be read through the formal aspects

of the poem, the content also offers interpretations of alternate voices. The images of “air” (3), “music” (5), and possibly “incense” (4) in this poem are particularly notable in this respect; as Isobel Armstrong notes, air, music, and vibration can often be comprehended as encoded, expressive signals, of “the *secret*, the hidden experience” that “gives language a secondary status and is often written of as if it cannot take linguistic form at all” (339). Incense, music, and the vibration of the “whisper” (6) of the ocean, are all expressions, or the motion of ideas (or spirit) from the self to the outside. The alliteration of “s” sounds—“drowsy incense” (4), “distant stream” (4), “whisper of a Summer sea” (6)—also expels air and whispers, creating an aural connection with the content and the idea of doubleness of voice and non-verbal means of expression in Armstrong’s commentary on Victorian expressive theory. This “movement outwards” is further illustrated in another stanza of the same poem:

Listen, the music swells into a song,  
 A simple song I loved in days of yore;  
     The echoes take it up and up along  
 The hills, and the wind blows it back again.—  
 Peace, peace, there is a memory in that strain  
 Of happy days that shall return no more. (13–18, 297)

The expressed music, which contains a “memory” (6) of happiness, is constantly in motion in this stanza as it “swells” (1), “echoes” (3), and is blown back again (4). The word “echoes” (3) conjures the myth of Echo, whose identity as a silenced female contributes to the subtext of double

voices in Armstrong's idea of Victorian expressive theory, in how she cannot communicate in her own words but only through vicarious means. The song is taken "up and up" (3) in a heavenward, transcendent motion. This music—and perhaps the poem itself by extension—has a freedom that goes beyond the speaker's circumstances. Its freedom is expressed through its sheer motion, or moving heavenwards, away from the speaker herself.

The next poem in the sequence also features elements in motion. This work is more evolved in its poetics of reserve:

Fade, tender lily,  
    Fade, O crimson rose,  
Fade every flower,  
    Sweetest flower that blows.

Go, chilly Autumn,  
    Come O Winter cold;  
Let the green stalks die away  
    Into common mould.

Birth follows hard on death,  
    Life on withering.  
Hasten, we shall come the sooner  
    Back to pleasant Spring.— (297–98)

The poem has fewer words than the previous one in the sequence, and

uses unadorned and simple images of flowers and weather. These particular images also make it more conventionally feminine, recalling the doubleness of Armstrong's reading of Victorian expressive theory, of how the more "conventional" the poem, the more likely "conventions are subjected to investigation, questioned, or used for unexpected purposes" (324). Behind each image of hope and renewal, of a spring (salvation, resurrection) that returns after the cold, are the dying flowers and the murderous chill of the present (suffering on Earth). Scheinberg, in presenting the opportunities for re-contextualizing scripture through the Victorian tradition of paraphrasing, uses Rossetti's "Consider the Lilies of the Field" as an example of flowers being used as imagery representing women (2–3). While flowers, being part of the reproductive organs of plants, can have such sexual or gender connotations, another reading would be to connect them with the first occurrence of lilies and roses in the novella, which would be the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys that Agnes and Mary were embroidering for the lectern cover of their church. As these flowers represent a life of virtue, the speaker's narration about their fading and dying may at first seem a commentary on the unjustness of both good and evil having to end and becoming "common mould" (8). However, it seems that she is saying that this suffering is necessary in order to be reborn into "pleasant Spring" (12). Even the Lily of the Valley must die before being reborn, like Christ, and all Christians at the end times. While this is ultimately a message of hope, the underlying message is that of current suffering, of sacrifice and

injustice.

The form of this poem recalls the simplicity of a nursery rhyme. Sharon Smulders notes that a hallmark of Rossetti's verses for children is how she was "deliberately pitching her singsongs at two different audiences," and that readers during that era were aware that her nursery rhymes were also targeted at adults ("Sound, Sense, and Structure" 10–1). This is how nursery rhymes can connect with Victorian expressive theory, in how they present a surface voice of child-like innocence and an underlying voice of adult melancholy. The formal device of children's rhymes restrains and modulates the melancholy within a familiar and reassuring context. From this point of control, the speaker contains the melancholy and works against it to create movement. Note the motion of the flower that "blows" (4) and the hastening (11) motion of the speaker from autumn and winter towards spring. "Spring" (12) is a metaphor for resurrection and spiritual rebirth, and the destination of not only Maude's renunciation, but the artistic ideal that her poetics of reserve aspires to. The tone of the entire poem is also prescriptive, using imperatives to command the flowers, weather, and spirit to change and set in motion. This imperative tone also adds to a sense of expressive agency on the part of the speaker.

The final poem in the sequence is a summation of the poetics of reserve, both in terms of its meaning and mechanics:

What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?—

'Take up the Cross, and come, and follow Me.'

This word He saith to all; no man may be  
Without the Cross, wishing to win the goal.  
Then take it bravely up, setting thy whole  
Body to bear; it will not weigh on thee  
Beyond thy utmost strength: take it; for He  
Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control  
The powers of darkness that thou need'st not fear.  
He will be with thee, helping, strengthening,  
Until it is enough: for lo, the day  
Cometh when He shall call thee: thou shalt hear  
His Voice That says: 'Winter is past, and Spring  
Is come; arise, My Love, and come away.'— (298)

The poem is a return to the sonnet form; as discussed in the Introduction, Rossetti used the sonnet as a way of reconciling the sacred and the profane (Taft 318), and this poem can be read as a final balancing between the poetics of melancholy and the poetics of reserve. The fact that it is not only a devotional poem but also a poem of religious love—“arise, My Love, and come away” (14)—is also indicative of this harmonization of affective energy and spiritual aspiration. In this particular poem, the speaker herself is in motion, presumably from this world and into the next (heaven); if “no man may be / Without the Cross” (3–4), the cross may symbolize death as well as sacrifice or the burdens of life. In either case, both death and sacrifice are movements outward (the soul moving out of the body), as sacrifice necessitates the self to acknowledge the presence

and needs of others before the desires of one's own ego. By following Jesus's words and taking up the cross, the speaker declares mastery over melancholy. As long as she follows his dictates, he "will control / The powers of darkness" (8–9), so she can rely on her religious convictions to sustain her even though she is "weak" (8). The volta begins in line seven of the octave instead of the first line of the sestet, with "for He / Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control" (7–8), as if salvation has moved or spread up from the sestet into the octave. This balancing of the traditional octave and sestet of eight and six lines to an even seven and seven, the first seven lines of melancholic resignation and the last seven of spiritual salvation, is also indicative of the reconciled poetics of melancholy and reserve. The implication of "control" (8) and the overcoming of difficulty through faith is an implicit reflection of her agency. It is the vector of this agency—that it enables movement—which makes her devotion empowering. With the final words, "arise, My Love, and come away" (14), the speaker has literally moved on from this world—along with the author, Maude—and is now beyond melancholy, or in other words the pressures and divisions that divide the immortal, infinite self.

# Conclusion: Revelation: Rossetti's Creative

## Poetics of *Ekstasis*

It can be said that, on any occasion a writer writes about writing or writers, they are implicitly representing a creative theory. *Maude*, arguably more than any of Rossetti's other works, may be read as the author's creative manifesto, and not only because it happens to be about writing and writers. It is also because it is one of her earliest works, written when Rossetti, like any other young and aspiring author, was thinking through the issues of her place in society and her ambitions as a literary artist. This thesis is an attempt to discern these concerns and the writer's resultant manifesto through a close examination of the main character's motivations and conflicts as they appear in her work. Rossetti, as a successful literary artist during an era where her social context seemed to conspire against her creativity, presents, along with other productive women writers of this period, a diversity of literary tools, methods, and heuristics that contemporary writers (female or otherwise) can possibly employ in their own artistic pursuits. Through *Maude*, Rossetti illustrates the productive interaction between melancholy and the poetics of Tractarian reserve in overcoming the social pressures that confine and fragment the creative and artistic self.

This thesis has sought to reveal the creative poetics of the poems in Rossetti's *Maude* by analyzing the dialectic between the main protagonist's artistic melancholy and her Tractarian poetics. *Maude's*

melancholy was read through Riede's theory of nineteenth-century poetic melancholy, where the literary melancholy is understood as a result of the clash between the Romantic "infinite" interior self and external nineteenth-century constraints that bourgeois culture imposed on individuals. In this interpretation, Maude may be understood as initially afflicted with melancholy because she is unable to reconcile her artistic ambition or the poetic potential of her "infinite self" with the social pressure to become an Angel in the House or a nun, two of the few sanctioned possibilities available to middle-class Victorian women. Her poetry expresses her melancholy as a transgression against such norms, helping her to define herself as an artist in the pattern of the male Romantic poets. However, such an identity is problematized by her religion's precepts against self-regard, or "vanity." I have argued that, by the end of the story, Maude is able to reconcile her Romantic "infinite self" with her religion through her application of Tractarian poetics. Specifically, Maude is able to find liberation through the "movement outwards," as defined by Isobel Armstrong, from the forces that confine the self, not through the repression of emotions, but their modulated expression. The development and eventual execution of this entire process can be observed in the evolution of Maude's poetry, a process that can be further understood through the contextualization of the poems within Rossetti's narrative.

Certain critics tend to regard Rossetti's religion as having subsumed her art, and that the aim of her poetry was ultimately to

abandon melancholic emotions to arrive at an egoless productive space through religion (Arseneau 86; Winters 300; Gilbert and Gubar, 554; Smulders “A Form that Differentiates” 163). Instead, I have argued that, in *Maude*, a different practice may be found, for melancholy is still very much in effect at the end of the text, and it is in dialectic between melancholy and ritualistic control that the power of her poetry is felt. Dombrowski observes that “the firm technical control and simple diction which characterize her poetry seem to arise not from equanimity and detachment but from attempts to resolve or control an underlying tension” (70). I have identified this “underlying tension” as Rossetti’s melancholy, and the “control” in her language as the poetics of reserve. Within Rossetti’s creative poetics, neither melancholy nor reserve is superior or subservient to the other.

*Maude*, thus, illustrates the development of the mechanism of Rossetti’s creative poetics. However, as juvenilia, it is not necessarily the poet’s best work. A more mature example of Rossetti’s artistry, and a better example of the full fruition of her Tractarian poetics of reserve, both in terms of form and content, would be “Winter: My Secret”:

I tell my secret? No indeed, not I:  
Perhaps some day, who knows?  
But not to-day; it froze, and blows, and snows,  
And you’re too curious: fie!  
You want to hear it? well:  
Only, my secret’s mine, and I won’t tell.

Or, after all, perhaps there's none:  
Suppose there is no secret after all,  
But only just my fun.  
To-day's a nipping day, a biting day;  
In which one wants a shawl,  
A veil, a cloak, and other wraps:  
I cannot ope to every one who taps,  
And let the draughts come whistling through my hall;  
Come bounding and surrounding me,  
Come buffeting, astounding me,  
Nipping and clipping through my wraps and all.  
I wear my mask for warmth: who ever shows  
His nose to Russian snows  
To be pecked at by every wind that blows?  
You would not peck? I thank you for good will,  
Believe, but leave that truth untested still.

Spring's an expansive time: yet I don't trust  
March with its peck of dust,  
Nor April with its rainbow-crowned brief showers,  
Nor even May, whose flowers  
One frost may wither through the sunless hours.  
Perhaps some languid summer day,

When drowsy birds sing less and less,  
And golden fruit is ripening to excess,  
If there's not too much sun nor too much cloud,  
And the warm wind is neither still nor loud,  
Perhaps my secret I may say,  
Or you may guess. (41)

The theme of the poem is, as the title suggests, a “secret” that the speaker does not reveal. The playful tone of the poem—“Suppose there is no secret after all, / But only just my fun” (8–9)—does not seem overtly melancholic, but the speaker’s distress under the effects of winter can stand in for the speaker’s melancholy, her consternation with weather that “froze, and blows, and snows” (3) with winds that “Come bounding and surrounding me, / Come buffeting, astounding me, / Nipping and clipping through my wraps and all” (15–17). Winter itself conjures a melancholic landscape, contrasting with the “expansive time” (23) of spring or the “warm wind” (32) blowing on a summer’s day. Yet, underneath the bleakness of winter and the “shawl, / A veil, a cloak, and other wraps” (11–12) the speaker employs against the cold, there lies, we are continuously made aware, a secret. The speaker’s shawls, veils, cloaks, and other wraps simultaneously conceal, and signal the presence of, this secret; the wraps are like deceptively simple poems, a blank surface with only the hint of what lies beneath. The secret itself is never revealed, although the reader is encouraged to try. Each stanza ends with an iambic pentameter line, except the last; there seems to be a final trimeter missing

at the end of the poem, as if inviting the reader to fill it in or imagine what it may be. The content of the final two lines also poses a challenge to the reader to guess, or it may be, instead, an unspoken warning, that “you may guess” (34), but you will never know. D’Amico cautions against guessing on “a single secret—romantic, sexual, spiritual, or political,” and that “it is far more useful to think in terms of secrets, that is, in terms of the complexity of the woman who wrote the poems” (176). I have argued that this “complexity” is the Romantic infinite self, which contains the “romantic, sexual, spiritual, or political,” or the collective potential of all the different “secrets” that can be read from the language. And it is the development and signaling of this mature complexity that makes *Maude*, despite it being juvenilia, an important work in understanding Rossetti’s artistry.

Sensitivity to such complexity is also necessary in order to understand the ambiguous ending of *Maude*. Some readers may perceive *Maude*’s death as the young Rossetti’s failure to imagine a heroine who can live in the mid-nineteenth-century world as both a devout woman and a respectable poet. Such a reading misses the point, as Rossetti went on to personally embody this ideal in her own career that followed *Maude*, through utilizing the poetics of reserve that enabled her to realize her devotional ideals and calibrate her melancholy to productive effect, creating a body of work that still resonates with readers in the present day. Redemption is also present within the narrative itself, namely through the dynamic of the “movement outwards” in the final poems, and this

dynamic, again, should be read through Maude's religious context. Karen Armstrong, a religious scholar and former nun, postulates the reason for religiously motivated movement from the ego as follows:

The Greek *ekstasis*, it will be recalled, simply means "standing outside." And "transcendence" means "climbing above and beyond" . . . What I now realize, from my study of the different religious traditions, is that a disciplined attempt to go beyond the ego brings about a state of ecstasy. Indeed it *is* in itself *ekstasis*. Theologians in all the great faiths have devised all kinds of myths to show that this type of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, is found in the life of God itself . . . We are most creative and sense other possibilities that transcend our ordinary experience when we leave ourselves behind. (278–79)

This process of *ekstasis* resembles the "movement outwards" of Isobel Armstrong's expressive theory of Victorian poetry. The Tractarian poetic mechanism of modulating the emotions as discussed throughout this thesis is ultimately an attempt to leave the self and "transcend our ordinary experience," or in this case, the confining pressures upon our infinite selves that creates melancholy in our lives. It seems that Maude was trying to achieve such *ekstasis*. In this case, Maude's death is symbolic of her soul standing outside of itself, having achieved if not in her art, then in Rossetti's, this *ekstasis*, or movement outwards into freedom.

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## 국문 초록

본 논문은 옥스퍼드 운동론의 절제 시학과 의식주의가 우울함을 전복시키는 과정이 크리스티나 로제티의 『모드』(1850)에 어떻게 드러났는가를 탐구한다. 또 옥스퍼드 운동론의 시학에 관한 기존 연구를 기반으로, 소설의 주인공 모드는 사회가 유도한 우울함에 종교와 의식주의로 대항한다고 해석한다. 서론은 19세기 영국 시에서 나타나는 우울함에 관한 데이비드 리드의 이론을 활용, 우울함을 “무한한” 내부성이 사회적 압력에 의해 쪼개진 “분열된 자아”의 표현이라고 정의한다. 이어 1장은 이 우울함이 모드에게 어떤 형태로 나타나는지, 이때 젠더와 계층 그리고 종교적 관습에 따른 양상은 무엇인지를 분석한다. 또 모드가 “집안의 천사” 혹은 수녀가 되라는 압박에서 벗어나고, 시인으로서의 정체성을 보호하기 위해 우울함을 겉으로 표현했다고 봤다. 2장은 모드의 시학에서 구약성경 전도서의 의미를 다룬다. 그리고 전도서에 내재한 우울함과 종교적 심의를 시에서 활용해 예술과 종교를 아우르는 창조적 미학을 끌어낸 모드를 보여준다. 전도서는 우울함을 내포한 동시에 예술적 생산성을 정당화하는 텍스트다. 나아가 3장은 옥스퍼드 운동론의 종교문학관이 로제티 문학의 우울함이나 예술성에 미친 영향을 더 구체적으로 살펴본다. 로제티 관련 사료와 존 키블 등 옥스퍼드 운동의 시인들에 대한 기존 연구를 두고 바탕으로 볼 때, 소설 『모드』는 우울한 시의 허영과 종교적 품위의 갈등을 조정하려 시도한 작품으로 읽을 수 있다. “집안의 천사”와 수녀의 길을 거부한 모드의 행위는 시 혹은 종교적 신념 하나만 선택하지 않고 본인의 예술혼을 종교적 신념과 조화시키려는 의도를 띠었다고 해석할 수 있기 때문이다. 결국 모드는

이소벨 암스트롱의 빅토리안 표현 시학에서 말하는 “외부로의 움직임”을 지향하는 방법으로 옥스퍼드 운동론의 절제 시학을 채택했다고 할 수 있다. 그는 종교와 우울함 모두를 예술에 활용해 우울함에 대항했다. 이 “외부로의 움직임”은 주인공 모드의 시로 나타난다. 해당 작품의 정밀 독서(close reading)는 작가 로제티 본인의 문학적 우울함과 옥스퍼드 운동론 시학 사이의 생산적인 변증법적 시학을 보여준다.

**주요어:** 크리스티나 로제티, 모드, 옥스퍼드 운동, 우울, 집안의 천사, 전도서

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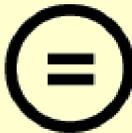
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문학석사학위논문

# Moving from Melancholy:

The Creative Poetics of Christina Rossetti's *Maude*

우울함에서 움직이기:

크리스티나 로제티의 『모드』에서 나타나는

창조적 시학

2016년 2월

서울대학교 대학원

영어영문학과 문학전공

허정범

## Abstract

# Moving from Melancholy:

## The Creative Poetics of Christina Rossetti's

### *Maude*

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This thesis illuminates the role of Tractarian reserve and ritualism in subverting the negative effects of melancholy in Christina Rossetti's novella, *Maude* (1850). Building on previous studies of Tractarian poetics, Rossetti's titular main protagonist is shown to use religion and ritualism in order to transcend her socially induced melancholy. The Introduction defines melancholy utilizing David G. Riede's theoretical reading of melancholy in nineteenth-century English poetry as the product of a "divided self" resulting from social pressures fragmenting an otherwise "infinite" interiority. The first chapter concerns the nature of melancholy specific to *Maude*, how it results from the pressures to bend her artistic ambitions to Victorian society's conventions on gender, class, and religious conventions. *Maude* is read as asserting or signaling her melancholy in order to counter the social pressures that surround her and

to protect her identity as a poet from the encroaching pressures of becoming an “Angel in the House” or an Anglican nun. The second chapter focuses on the significance of the Book of Ecclesiastes in Maude’s poetics, discussing how she appropriates both the melancholy and religious contemplation of this text to bring out a creative aesthetic between art and religion. Ecclesiastes is shown to be a melancholic text that, at the same time, justifies artistic productivity. The third chapter discusses Rossetti’s Tractarian religio-literary influences in more detail by examining the ways in which they shaped and promoted her melancholic and artistic impulses. Utilizing biographical details and previous studies on the Tractarian poetics outlined by John Keble and other poets of the Oxford Movement, *Maude* is read as an attempt to reconcile the vanity of melancholic poetry and the main character’s sense of religious decorum. Thus, Maude is interpreted as rejecting the roles of the Angel in the House and the Anglican nun, and, instead, finding a way of accommodating her art within her religious convictions, as opposed to forcing herself to reject outright either her poetry or her beliefs. Ultimately, Maude is understood as adopting the Tractarian poetics of reserve in order to work against the melancholy in a “movement outward,” a maneuver described by Isobel Armstrong in her version of the Victorian expressive theory of poetry, effectively using both her religion and her melancholy to realize her art. This “movement outward” is illustrated through close readings of Maude’s poetry, illuminating Rossetti’s own productive dialectic between melancholy and the Tractarian poetics of reserve.

**Keywords:** Christina Rossetti, Maude, melancholy, Tractarianism,  
Oxford Movement, Angel in the House, Ecclesiastes

**Student ID:** 2014-20096

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# Introduction: Genesis: The Productivity of Melancholy

“It’s a very sad poem.”

“Young girls are sad. They like to be; it makes them feel strong.”

—A. S. Byatt, *Possession*

In her seminal essay on Victorian women’s poetry “A Music of Thine Own” (1994), Isobel Armstrong speaks of an “expressive tradition” of Victorian women’s poetry, of a “doubleness” of voice that is, on the surface, “often simple, often pious, often conventional” but, upon closer inspection, questioning the very conventions that it superficially upholds (324). As Byatt incisively asserts in *Possession*, her novel on Victorian poetry and literary scholarship dedicated to Armstrong, women’s poems of sadness can be understood as having more than one reading. While undoubtedly inspiring feelings of melancholy in readers, there is, at a different level, a redemptive aspect to every poem of sadness. This feature does not necessarily depend on any turn within the lines of the text, although many poems labeled as melancholic do, indeed, include such an affective textual surface; the fundamentally redemptive quality of the melancholic poem resides in the fact that it exists at all. When applying Armstrong’s theory of the doubleness of women’s Victorian poetry, even the most desolate melancholic surface voice can be heard not merely as

nihilistic angst, but as a struggle for meaning and existence that begets beauty and knowledge. The poem that readers see before them thus functions as the very product or creation of this noble struggle.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) is a poet with a melancholic reputation. Portraits repeatedly depict her as a solitary figure clad head-to-toe in ascetic black, and critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have characterized her as a poet of resignation and hope deferred (587). What is perhaps often overlooked is the fact she was also a prolific writer who enjoyed literary fame in her own lifetime; she was even considered a viable candidate for the position of poet laureate after Tennyson's death (*Flowers xlv*). Thus, despite her gloomy demeanor and renunciatory stance, she was a productive artist. While this may seem a contradiction, due to a tendency to conflate melancholy with debilitating depression, I argue that melancholy is, on the contrary, an enabling affective artistic agent, and that Rossetti illustrates, in *Maude*, a method in which melancholy can be controlled to empower creativity.

*Maude* was written when Rossetti was nineteen years old, and published posthumously. This three-part novella depicts the life of an ambitious, devout, and melancholic young poet, who is conflicted by society's gendered expectations, her artistic desire, and Christian demands for self-denial. This conflict is encoded into the fourteen poems featured within the narrative, especially the eleven works that are presented as Maude's compositions. What is particularly notable about the poetry that appears in *Maude* is that despite the profusion of melancholic emotion in

the poems, they are disciplined and controlled in their form; half of the works are sonnets while the other half includes a hymn (“Thank God, Thank God, We Do Believe”), a tripartite epithalamium (“Three Nuns”), and a nursery rhyme (“Fade, Tender Lily”). While the narrative itself is seemingly a melancholic one, as the main protagonist in the process of realizing her art meets a tragic end, I argue that Maude’s success as an artist can be traced through the evolution of her thinking in her poetry, which transitions from melancholic into a movement outwards from melancholy, assisted by religious poetic principles.

*Maude* is widely considered by critics to be largely autobiographical, because—in addition to similarities between Rossetti and Maude in terms of social background, interests, and appearance—the text is viewed as exploring issues relating to a broken engagement that occurred due to religious differences in the year Rossetti completed the manuscript (Leighton 373). The relationship ended when Rossetti’s fiancé, the painter James Collinson of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, re-converted to Roman Catholicism, making the union impossible for the Anglican Rossetti. In fact, throughout the relationship, Collinson had struggled to reconcile his role as an artist with his identity as a religious person; he also resigned from the Brotherhood upon his re-conversion to Rome (Marsh 115–16). Thus, the theme of conflict between artistic, religious, and societal obligations must have been doubly on the young Rossetti’s mind, having witnessed it in Collinson, and having experienced it herself as a young Christian woman and aspiring poet of the Victorian

middle classes.

At the start of the text, socially withdrawn Maude is seen creating opportunities to display her talent to her community and peers. At a birthday party, she proposes a game of verse composition using a given rhyme scheme and presents an exemplar of black humor; the other two participants, both more representative of Victorian middle-class femininity, produce poems with safer, more conventional perspectives. As the narrative progresses, Maude feels increasingly guilty over her literary pursuits, presenting her cousin and confidante, Agnes, with a poem that alludes to her unease. Maude subsequently has an accident—her hackney cab is overturned—and is confined to her bed. She meets with her parish priest and is absolved of her religious guilt, bringing about a new peace, but, from the narrative situation alone, it is uncertain how she resolved the conflict between her religious beliefs and her poetic ambition. This redemption and growth can only be discerned by closely reading Maude’s poems, embedded throughout the text and presented by the narrator in a specific sequence that charts the movement of Maude’s reasoning.

My thesis thus explores the relationship between Maude’s melancholy and artistic creativity by examining Maude’s poetry and its context within the *Künstlerroman* narrative. For an important final revelation is that Maude’s melancholic period was artistically prolific; at the end of the work, a friend tasked with carrying out Maude’s final wishes is “astonished at the variety of Maude’s compositions” (296) that she finds among her belongings. Additionally, Maude’s melancholy is

productive not only in terms of quantity, but also discursively in terms of its conflict with her religious devotion and society's expectations of femininity. I will demonstrate how the melancholic poems Maude composes frequently concern the conflicts between her artistic ambitions and the societal pressures of matrimony and motherhood, religious beliefs, or anxieties about her choices. Ultimately, it is my contention that, although Maude dies at the end of the novella, she does find a path that suggests reconciliation between the demands of her religious devotion, gender, and art through utilization of a poetics of religious reserve as advocated by John Keble—leader of the Tractarian Movement, bestselling poet, and Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1831 to 1841—in order to move beyond the poetics of melancholy. This idea of a poetics of religious reserve, also referred to as Tractarian poetics or the “poetics of reserve,” will be developed throughout this thesis, culminating in a close examination of its mechanics in Chapter Three. Although Mary Arseneau has agreed that a similar process of melancholy controlled by Tractarian reserve is at work in *Maude*, she has not closely examined how this movement occurs, only suggesting that the reason for Maude's shift in her poetics was mainly to accommodate Rossetti's religious beliefs (93). In this thesis, I will chart this movement from the poetics of melancholy to that of reserve by closely reading the poetry of “Maude” and contextualizing the conflicts the poems represent in their socio-historical context. In this process, I hope to offer fresh insights about the intricacies of Rossetti's artistic creativity.

## The Productive Tradition of Poetic Melancholy in Nineteenth-Century England

It is not surprising to see an aspiring young writer in the nineteenth century utilizing a poetics of melancholy, as a tradition of melancholic sensibility was prevalent among poets during the long nineteenth century. Rossetti worked within the Romantic tradition of the post-Wordsworthian poets, of Byron, Shelley or Keats; in particular, Keats was a significant influence, attested by the fact that Rossetti wrote her poem “On Keats” as tribute. David Riede, in *Allegories of One’s Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry*, notes the seeming paradox of how melancholy, against expectations, seems to stimulate the production of poetry instead of hindering it:

Coleridge’s dejection anticipated the more poetically productive melancholy of the first generation of post-Wordsworthian poets: the titanic suffering of Byron’s gloomy heroes, the bleak skepticism of Shelley, and the luxuriant melancholy of Keats, but it more accurately anticipated the later dejection of the Victorians, who often saw melancholy as we now see depression, as a mute or incoherent mood that imprisons the sufferer within himself and the precise antithesis of poetic creativity. Ironically, however, as we shall see, the rejection or policing of melancholy actually intensifies melancholy as it divides the mind more emphatically against itself and, more, the Victorian melancholy of melancholy

turns out to be poetically productive rather than disabling. (1–2)

Riede continues his argument connecting the melancholy of the Romanticists with that of the Victorians by drawing a continuum between the “infinite inwardness” of the poetic sensibilities of both eras, and asserting that, in the Victorian age, this sense of the Romantic, infinite self was beset by the “finite actuality” of the reifying and compartmentalizing qualities of nineteenth-century capitalism and by the rise of scientific intellectualism or the “disappearance of God” (8). Under this schema, the fragmentation of the self subsequently leads to conflict between the fragmented selves, manifesting in the melancholy affect. Riede states that, under this division of self, melancholy turns out to be “poetically productive rather than disabling” (2) in creating a dialectic, in the form of poetry, between an “infinite self” and a fragmented, policing conscience. His understanding of the poetics of melancholy is, in the end, “the ways that the ‘buried life’ of the infinite self, perceived as anterior to language, could find expression” (17).

This “infinite self” of the Romantic soul can also be said to be the content of literary “genius.” Consequently, the display of such boundless interiority through the display of melancholy is effectively a signaling of literary genius, a conceit that Maude is shown to understand and exploit. Still later on, Maude’s mature poetic voice developed by the end of the novella is read as resulting from her use of the Tractarian poetics of reserve as the “rejecting or policing of melancholy” (Riede 2). This rejecting or policing, a dialectic process between Tractarian emotional

reserve and melancholy, enables the expression of Maude's infinite self beyond the confines of her situation.

## **The Poetics of Tractarian Reserve**

As discussed previously, nineteenth-century literary melancholy can be said to arise from the conflict between “a Romantic sense of the infinite, mysterious depths of the self with a Victorian sense of the finite socially constructed ‘character’” (Riede 8). For Rossetti, the “mysterious depths of the self” most likely pertain to her literary imagination; I will illustrate in Chapters One and Two that the melancholic poetry of *Maude* results from the conflict between Maude's ideas about the particular limited set of Victorian “finite socially constructed ‘character[s]’” available to her: namely the Angel in the House, the nun, and the artist. At this point, the role of Rossetti's religion in her work requires attention considering its central importance in her poetry.

Rossetti was an intensely religious person. Specifically, her faith was shaped by the rise of Tractarian Anglicanism—also known as the Oxford Movement or High Church Movement—during the Victorian era. From 1843, Rossetti attended services at Christ Church on Albany Street, which was a Tractarian establishment (Marsh 55). The term “Tractarianism” refers to a movement within the Church of England that gathered force from the 1830s when its leaders—clerical Oxford dons—published a series of tracts entitled *Tracts for the Times*. These works, which outlined their preferred doctrines and practices, emphasized

ritualism. For instance, they argued for the Church of England to adopt more stylized rituals including auricular confession, more elaborate vestments for the clergy, and a Gothic revival in church architecture (Melnyk 23–27). The Tractarians are also known for their interest in literary aesthetics. Mark Knight and Emma Mason assert that “Tractarianism is perhaps the most literary of those nineteenth-century theologies” because its key figures—John Keble, John Henry Newman, Edward Bouvier Pusey, and Isaac Williams—were “poets as well as preachers,” so that Tractarianism was consequently “grounded in poetics as much as theology” (87).

Kirstie Blair, in her study on the relationship between poetic form and religious faith in the Victorian era, connects High Church ritualism with the strict poetic forms practiced by adherents to the Tractarian literary aesthetic. “Ritual ‘fortifies’ the mind against ‘natural thoughts,’” she asserts, “Forms here supply the necessary self-discipline, a way of focusing the individual’s mind on submission to God and his laws rather than on his or her own relatively petty thoughts and feelings” (30). John Keble (1792–1866), Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1831 to 1841, was particularly influential in both his theory of Tractarian poetics (the key dynamic of which involves the healthy release of emotions through controlled form) and his own application of said poetics. Blair presents the poems of Keble’s bestseller *The Christian Year* as the epitome of Tractarian poetry in its usage of regular meter that soothes, strengthens, and disciplines the reader through the application of its orderly form (40).

Notably, Knight and Mason single out Rossetti as an example of a Tractarian poet who practiced “ritualist poetry” and who used the poem as a “spiritual space” or “an incandescent portal into God’s mysteries, just as the somber and shadowed ritualist church space was illuminated by endless candles catching the light from priests’ vestments, crystalline chalices, and stained glass” (108). These images of ritual or self-discipline, however, are not about the repression of feelings through a rigid adherence to form, but about the modulation and better expression of feelings (such as melancholy) in a controlled, productive manner. Emma Francis makes this clear in her examination of Keble’s influence on Victorian women’s poetry, where Tractarian sensibility shapes, calibrates, and ultimately enables emotion to build up in intensity and express itself more fully (123). I argue that this controlling and ultimately enabling quality of the Tractarian “poetics of reserve” (Arseneau 67) is the true religious voice aimed at by Rossetti’s Maude.

In a sense, *Maude* traces the artistic growth of a young Tractarian poet, the kind of poet Rossetti herself would become. This can be observed by how Maude’s melancholy is gradually controlled and modulated by her “poetics of reserve” that are close to Rossetti’s own Tractarian literary aesthetics. At this point, Armstrong’s “expressive tradition,” or expressive theory of Victorian women poets, is particularly useful in this examination of the dynamic between melancholy and religious (Tractarian) ritualism. Recalling Blair’s comments on the Tractarian poetic modes of the soothing and strengthening qualities of

regular meter, the controlled form of Maude's poems can indicate ritualistic thinking in poems that are otherwise melancholic in content. Either part of the double voice—in other words, the surface conventional or the underlying subversive—can manifest either melancholy or spiritual devotion, suggesting a dialectic of modulation between melancholy and ritualistic form. When integrating the poetics of Tractarian reserve with melancholy, a poem of melancholy can be read as inversely, through its form, as expressing an “underlying” religious redemption; conversely, the “surface” voice of an outwardly pious poem can be read as enabling the control and regulation of an implied or anterior melancholy. Either case results in the creation of meaningful art in the process.

For clarification, I will elaborate on my thesis through a case-study reading of Christina Rossetti's “The World,” which is reproduced in full below:

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:  
But all night as the moon so changeth she;  
Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy  
And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.  
By day she woos me to the outer air,  
Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:  
But through the night, a beast she grins at me,  
A very monster void of love and prayer.  
By day she stands a lie: by night she stands  
In all the naked horror of the truth

With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.

Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell

My soul to her, give her my life and youth,

Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell? (70)

Here, a melancholic description of the profane world as “A very monster void of love and prayer” (8) with “pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands” (11) articulates a detachment from such a sphere and a turning towards higher, sacred truths. The only word that directly references religion is “prayer” (8), although descriptions of the devil such as “pushing horns” (11) and “cloven” (14) feet also hint at a Christian subtext. The surface voice expresses melancholic disgust of the “Loathsome and foul” (3) secular world that threatens to overwhelm the speaker, while the underlying voice of focused competence and control formally checks the speaker from succumbing to the temptations of “Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety” (6).

The form is particularly indicative of the Tractarian poetics of reserve. Specifically, the poem is a sonnet, arguably the most proscribed poetic form in English literature. Joseph Phelan emphasizes the fact that the history of the devotional sonnet is nearly as long as that of the amatory, and highlights the influence Wordsworth’s *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* had on religious Victorian poets (85). Joshua Taft notes that Rossetti understood the sonnet to be “a battleground between Petrarchan love and Christian devotion,” and that it is consequently well suited to represent conflict between secular and religious modes (318). Taft also connects Keble’s

approval of the restrictiveness of the sonnet form with Rossetti's preference for the restrictiveness of the Petrarchan form over the looser English model (319). The above sonnet is also Petrarchan, following the *abbaabba* rhyme scheme for the octave and a regimented *cdcede* rhyme scheme for the sestet; this order and control reflects the attempt for emotional control under Tractarian poetics. Indeed, the Petrarchan sonnet form was heavily utilized by the Tractarians, as evidenced in *Lyra Apostolica*, a collection of poetry published in 1836 by the key poets—J. W. Bowden, Richard Froude, John Keble, Henry Newman, Isaac Wilberforce, and Isaac Williams—within the movement (Tennyson 130, 135, 136). Elizabeth Ludlow further associates Rossetti's utilization of the sonnet form within her religious context, or her “hermeneutics of piety,” by connecting the arrangement of her devotional sonnets' images to the structure of the Psalms (35). Throughout this thesis, there will be examples of Maude using the Bible as an intertextual touchstone for authority and subtext, such as her paraphrases. For now, it must be noted that Maude's writing of religious sonnets must also be understood as religious acts that take on literary form, and any reading or discussion concerning them should consider the possible interactions with scripture in terms of both form and content.

The presence of a double voice, however, is not exclusively a matter of form against content; in Tractarian poetics, emotion can be modulated not only through ritualistic form, but also through religious content. A conventional-seeming devotional poem is often the result of

such modulation, and therefore a subtext of the modulated emotion (often melancholy, in the case of Rossetti) can be discerned from closely reading the text. An example of this is Rossetti's "The Love of Christ which Passeth Knowledge," which is an outwardly devout poem that nevertheless is working against a hidden voice or subtext of melancholy:

A thief upon My right hand and My left;

Six hours alone, athirst, in misery:

At length in death one smote My heart and cleft

A hiding-place for thee.

Nailed to the racking cross, than bed of down

More dear, whereon to stretch Myself and sleep:

So did I win a kingdom,—share My crown;

A harvest,—come and reap. (21–28; 60)

Its surface message of hope: "At length in death one smote My heart and cleft / A hiding-place for thee" (23–24) answers an unspoken, underlying voice of despair in search of succor or such "hiding-place" (24). The poem takes on a hymnic structure, with stanzas that are quatrains of iambic verse with a simple *abab* rhyme scheme. Such a structure is evocative of the hymn, which, among other things, is often joyful or consoling. The need for consolation is alluded to through the persistent references to pain: "athirst, in misery" (22), "in death one smote My heart" (23), and "Nailed to the racking cross" (25). Yet, each instance of suffering is accompanied by an instance of relief: "a hiding-place for

thee” (24) or “bed of down” (25). This dialectic of pain and consolation is reflective of the dialectic of melancholy and ritualized form observed in the previous example of Rossetti’s poetry. These poems both represent the dialectic between melancholy and Tractarian reserve, whether in terms of form or content, and are the products of it; as such, they attest to the productivity of melancholy and its modulation.

### **Previous Studies on the Melancholy of *Maude***

As Cynthia Scheinberg has pointed out, Rossetti’s intricate use of religion is more discursive than has been discussed by many critics, especially those associated with second-wave feminism, who regard the influence of religion as singularly oppressive (9). This dismissive attitude may be exemplified by Gilbert and Gubar’s remark wherein Rossetti is “banqueting on bitterness” and feels she “must bury herself alive in a coffin of renunciation” (575). In response to twentieth-century feminists’ tendencies to dismiss or criticize the influence of religion on Rossetti’s work, critics sought to understand the Tractarian aspects of Rossetti’s oeuvre. G. B. Tennyson began this movement in 1981 by heralding Rossetti as “the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry” (198) and calling for an examination of her Tractarian poetics as a key to understanding her work (203).

Since this early study, a number of critics have produced readings that diversify the earlier interpretation of Rossetti’s religion as merely oppressive or repressive. For instance, Arseneau has focused on the role

of female communities in Anglo-Catholic contexts that show the empowering influence of religion on the Rossetti's life and work (3). In her reading of "Maude" in particular, Arseneau locates a Tractarian "poetics of reserve" within the conflicts of the story and the embedded poetry, positioning religion as a crucial aesthetic keystone that completes the "reticence, secrecy, mastery, renunciation, modesty, and detachment which are the hallmarks of Rossetti's poetic style" (67). Tractarian reserve is, thus, seen as a key to Rossetti's mastery of the poetic form, a heuristic for the control (not repression) of her creative impulses to productive effect. Dinah Roe, in her study of Rossetti's faith, delves into an analysis of the poet's relatively neglected devotional prose and argues for a more nuanced view than regarding religion as scaffolding for subversion (5). This thought is an echo from Diane D'Amico, who cautions against diminishing the influence of Tractarianism for the sake of reductive political agendas, and asserts Rossetti's "hopeful and joyous messages" tend to be ignored as a consequence (64). It is clear that a purely historical or psychological approach cannot create a full historical or psychological picture of Rossetti's work, and that an understanding of the Tractarian poetics of reserve is essential in any reading of her poetry.

In the context of this previous research, the religious aspect of Rossetti's poetry is a key catalyst in the expression of her artistry, not an afterthought or a subterfuge of social propriety. I argue that melancholy is subjected to the religious catalyst of restraint and intensified expression. This religious modulation, or the Tractarian poetics of reserve, is utilized

by Maude as a form of Victorian expressive theory, which enables her not only to overcome her melancholy or possible depression, but also to use it to create poetry in a productive act of redemptive artistry.

In Chapter One of this thesis, I will outline the major conflicts in *Maude* between literary ambition, socially gendered expectations, and religious ideals. The dynamics of these conflicts will be interpreted through the poetry within the story, enabling a contextualized understanding of Maude's concerns as an aspiring writer, woman, and devout Christian in nineteenth-century England. Chapter Two concerns the narrative's central conflict between Maude's expressed melancholy and her Christian conception of vanity as sin. Chapter Three presents my interpretation of Maude's solution for reconciling these different priorities, where I examine how she uses the poetics of reserve to harness the poetics of melancholy to artistically productive effect. The precise mechanism of this harnessing will be revealed through a close reading of the sequence of Maude's final poems. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of the implications of Maude's solution, for our understanding of both Rossetti's work and on the work of religious writers in general.

# Chapter One: The Poetics of Melancholy and Gender

## Maude and the Assertion of Melancholy

The narrator introduces the eponymous heroine of Christina Rossetti's "Maude" through the following words:

She also knew that people thought her clever, and that her little copies of verses were handed about and admired. Touching these same verses, it was the amazement of every one what could make her poetry so broken-hearted as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote very foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply set her down as affected. (266)

Although the narrator suggests that readers should "form their own estimate of Maude's character" (266), this passage invites the readers to find her as "affected" more than having "any secret source of uneasiness." In the scene that follows this description, we are given a comical description of Maude, who has just finished writing a melancholic sonnet about the nobility of suffering; upon finishing, she "yawned, leaned back on her chair, and wondered how she should fill the time till dinner" (266). In addition, while other poems in "Maude" were published elsewhere in Rossetti's lifetime, the sonnet in question—"Yes, I too could face death and never shrink"—was not (Penguin Classics, 831). The work's omission

from print culture during Rossetti's life hints that she may have found this sonnet unworthy. Indeed, the fact that she uses it to illustrate Maude's folly may be indication enough that she found it juvenile:

Yes, I too could face death and never shrink:  
But it is harder to bear hated life;  
To strive with hands and knees weary of strife;  
To drag the heavy chain whose every link  
Galls to the bone; to stand upon the brink  
Of the deep grave, nor drowse, though it be rife  
With sleep; to hold with steady hand the knife  
Nor strike home: this is courage as I think.  
Surely to suffer is more than to do:  
To do is quickly done; to suffer is  
Longer and fuller of heart-sicknesses:  
Each day's experience testifies of this:  
Good deeds are many, but good lives are few;  
Thousands taste the full cup; who drains the lees? — (265–66)

The poem is an exhibition of melancholy from beginning to end, with almost every line save three starting with a long-stressed sound, giving the impression of grim determination (when trochaic) or of a dragging and slow rhythm (when spondaic). The trochees “Yes, I” (1), “Galls to” (5), “Of the” (6), “Surely” (9), “Longer” (11), and “Thousands” (14) begins their respective lines with dramatic declaration, and combined with the overall content of the poem imbues the speaker's voice with judgment,

perhaps as if from God or an avenging angel. The spondees throughout the poem slow down the rhythm, adding to the gloomy mood. They also occur in key images: “deep grave” (6), “strike home” (8), “heart-sicknesses” (11), “full cup” (14) are all melancholic images, and the slowing effect of the spondee makes readers linger in the image of the deep grave, the strike upon home, sickness in the heart, and the full cup of suffering. The aphorism of line thirteen, “Good deeds are many, good lives are few,” is sonically built on parallel spondees of “Good deeds” and “good lives,” drawing comparison between the two and inserting a ponderous, existential observation that adds to the angst of the poem.

Yet despite the melancholy of the poem, the strength in the meter and the terse lengths of the lines betray more power through control rather than give the reader a sense of powerlessness or loss of control. The final two lines seem to show contempt for the members of the speaker’s milieu who do not “drain the lees” (14), instead living an existence that is incomplete in its “goodness” (possibly of Christian goodness or artistic integrity, considering the themes of *Maude*). This distancing of herself from such people draws towards herself a strong sense of vocation that distinguishes her from the crowd; in fact, this final line is from Matthew 20:22,<sup>1</sup> and the speaker is dramatically comparing her suffering to Jesus’s own sacrifice. The answer to the sonnet’s final question—“who drains the lees?”—seems to be the author herself. Therefore, the underside to the

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<sup>1</sup> “But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.”

melancholy of this sonnet is a feeling of control and ambition.

Maude's melancholy in this poem and the others discussed in this chapter relate to what Showalter identifies, in her essay on *Maude*, as Rossetti's own "anxieties about poetic achievement, her wishes both to be admired for her genius and to renounce it as unfeminine" ("Introduction" ix). While the poem can be read in many different ways—for example, as a grim anthem to Christian sacrifice—it can also be seen as an artist's manifesto or declaration of creative intent. Indeed, it has the strategic position of being the first poem in a story about a young aspiring poet, and sets the tone of Maude's artistry. In this sense, her melancholy is a result of the conflict between her literary ambition and the external pressures against it. These pressures upon Maude's "unfeminine" ambition are the gravity that works upon the "heavy chains" (4) of her desire to be a writer, and the emotional result of such exertions is the melancholy that is present in the poem.

As mentioned before, this melancholy is, however, treated with some skepticism by the narrator. Maude's yawning and wondering what to do to fill the time before dinner imply that some simulation of depth, or "faking," is going on in the poem. Anne Finch (1661–1720) critiques this "faking" of melancholy and its intended effect on others' perceptions in her poem "The Spleen":

The fool, to imitate the wits,  
Complains of thy pretended fits,  
And dullness, born with him, would lay

Upon thy accidental sway;  
Because, sometimes, thou dost presume  
Into the ablest heads to come:  
That, often, men of thoughts refined,  
Impatient of unequal sense,  
Such slow returns, where they so much dispense,  
Retiring from the crowd, are to thy shades inclined. (64–73)

The “fool” (64) affects melancholy in order to imitate the “wits” (64) and be perceived as clever as the wits are, for the spleen—thought to be the source of melancholy during Finch’s time—is where “men of thoughts refined” (70), when tiring of the mediocrity of “the crowd” (73), seek sanctuary. Thus, melancholy was understood simultaneously as an indication of disappointment in one’s community and a marker of intellectual superiority. This is not to say Maude’s anxieties are necessarily inauthentic; her relaxed manner after composing the poem may simply indicate a temporary exorcism of anxieties through the process of writing. The narrator’s skepticism may be a reflection of the normative gaze of Maude’s society, the kind of judgment in “The Spleen,” upon Maude’s ambitions. However, this disdain of Maude’s melancholy softens into sympathy as the narrative progresses; *Maude* is not, in the end, a satirical work. The narrator’s shift in how Maude’s melancholy is interpreted—from it being a performance to being authentic—may be read, instead, as a critique of the normative gaze that distorts the melancholy of young literary women as being pretentious. For there is

something more than Maude being a “fool” (64) imitating the “wits” (64). This act may be better understood within the context of Douglas Trevor’s argument that such expression of melancholy is a gesticulation towards a worthy subjectivity (2). Therefore, to make such gesticulations of gloominess and withdrawal is to signal “unequal sense” (71), or extraordinary intelligence, thus producing the impression of a subjectivity worthy of the interest of others. As Finch recognized in “The Spleen,” because melancholy poets tend to be deemed more interesting and authentic, some poets may express melancholy in order to assert their identity as poets. In other words, Maude in this instance is utilizing her melancholy to signal her identity as a poet.

This expressive aspect of melancholy can be understood as part of a larger behavioral pattern of Maude signaling her literary subjectivity. At this early point in the story, Maude utilizes another self-fashioning strategy by simultaneously revealing and concealing her writing. Significantly, she composes her poem in the sitting room, so that she is “visibly slipping out of sight some scrawled paper” (265) as her mother enters. Maude could have written in her bedroom if she had desired privacy, but she has positioned herself in a communal part of the house where she can easily be discovered. She also hides her writing as she is being interrupted; the writing itself may not be visible but the act of hiding it is (and ultimately, the fact that she is writing). This is arguably deliberate; Maude does not necessarily want others to know what she is writing, but she seems to want others to know that she *is* writing. At Mrs

Strawdy's tea party in Chapter Two of Part Two, she declines, with obvious distaste, to recite some of her poetry when prompted: "You will excuse me;" Maude at last said very coldly: 'I could not think of monopolizing every one's attention'" (279). Yet, when a cousin presents her with a wreath that sports a bay leaf symbolizing poetic achievement, despite Maude's protestation that, "I have not earned the bay," the narrator notes immediately after, "still she did not remove it" (268). Maude's implicit revelation of her writing to her mother and others is like the unearned bay leaf: it signals her authorial identity to the outside world.

## **Melancholy and Killing the Angel in the House**

If Maude were confident in her identification as an artist, she would not feel the need to continuously assert her claim to being one. However, the persistence of her signaling inversely indicates that such an identity is constantly under attack. There are different kinds of pressures working against Maude's ambitions in the novella, beginning with the burden to conform to the ideal of domestic virtue as exemplified by Coventry Patmore's depiction of his deceased wife in "The Angel in the House," an ideal that women of Maude's time and class in England were strongly encouraged to aspire to. Nina Auerbach states that, in the Victorian era, the Angel in the House was "convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be" (67), a woman who would willingly sacrifice her personal interests for her husband and children. Aparna Gollapudi states that this myth was so widespread during

this time that it even managed to go beyond its bourgeoisie origins to cross class boundaries, effectively enshrining (and confining) women of both middle and aristocratic classes in the domestic sphere (81). Reflecting back in the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf describes the Angel in the House as follows:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. (141)

As Woolf notes, this ideal was pervasive in its time: “In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel” (141). Woolf’s argument is particularly relevant to Maude’s situation as an aspiring writer; the insidious presence of the Angel in the House is satirically personified in Woolf’s essay as a literal angel that physically and verbally interferes with Woolf’s writing. Woolf describes how she decided as a young writer that the only way she could write about “the truth about human relations, morality, sex” (142) was to “kill” the Angel in the House: “Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing” (141). Maude also attempts to “kill” the Angel in the House by expressing, instead of concealing, her melancholy, and by rebelling against the Victorian domestic norms through her poetry. But, in order to read Maude’s poems as such, her

characterization within the novella as being antithetical to the Angel in the House needs to be drawn out for context.

Maude is not described as being particularly feminine or maternal. In terms of appearance, she has “a habitual shrugging stoop” (266) and an unhealthy pallor or “a fixed paleness” (266) so noticeable that it draws comments from different characters throughout the novella. The clearest sign of Maude’s distance from the Angel-in-the-House ideal is the contrast between Maude and her cousins, Mary and Agnes, who are exemplars of the Angel in the House. Although Agnes is a year older than Mary, the two sisters bear strong twin-like similarities with each other. Indeed, while they and Magdalen all serve as “alternate selves” for Maude and “doubles” for the young Rossetti within the story (Gilbert and Gubar 550), the similarities are particularly striking between the sisters. The narrator emphasizes this similarity by noting that: “both were well-grown and well-made, with fair hair, blue eyes and fresh complexions” (267). Mary and Agnes are pretty, healthy, and personable, although Agnes is more mature and self-effacing than her younger sister. Agnes may be understood as an older, more maternal version of Mary, an “Auntie,” as described by nineteenth-century novelist Dinah Maria Mulock.<sup>2</sup> Neither character transgresses her proscribed social boundaries, nor seems to have any inclination to do so. By the end of the novella, Mary is happily married, and Agnes continues her role as caregiver to her family by

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<sup>2</sup> Mulock describes this “auntie” as a happily unmarried female relation who is “[A] universal referee, nurse, playmate, comforter, and counselor . . . her manner, settled, cheerful, and at ease; her unflinching interest in all things and all people” (1597).

carrying out Maude's last wishes.

This contrast between Maude and Mary or Agnes seems intentional from the start of the text as Maude's first scene and Mary's are structurally juxtaposed. In this first scene, Maude is writing verses in her sitting room and ignoring her mother, Mrs Foster—notably another Angel in the House—who, presumably as a result of her self-abnegating service to others, is “only too much accustomed to inattention” (265). In contrast, Mary is introduced arranging flowers in “another sitting room” (266), gladly accepting her mother's request to bring Maude and Mrs. Foster from the train station. Their different attitudes to their mothers indicate similarly contrasting attitudes towards the Angel-in-the-House ideal: Maude is contemptuous of it, while Mary obeys it. Importantly, Maude is writing in her first scene, whereas Mary is performing domestic and feminine tasks. Maude's act of writing is at odds with the demands of the Angel in the House. In the opening chapter, Mrs Foster literally interrupts Maude in the act of writing by trying to get her to pay attention to a domestic matter, distracting her much like Woolf's satirical embodiment of the Angel did with the “shadow of her wings” and the “rustling of her skirt” (Woolf 141). It is also notable that it is Maude's mother who utters the opening line of the entire story: “A penny for your thoughts” (265). The line draws the reader's attention to the fact that being an author in the modern world is about being paid for your thoughts and possessing an interiority worthy of being exchanged for monetary value in the market of ideas that is print culture. Here, it is the Angel in the House that stands at

the threshold between Maude and the world of literary commerce, both symbolically and literally blocking her daughter's entry into this conventionally masculine domain. This aspect of Maude's relation with her mother also recalls Showalter's assertion of Maude's awareness and anxiety over the "unfeminine" nature of writing, a theme that resurfaces in Agnes's sonnet later on in the story.

Maude seems keen to distance herself from domestic chores that bring her closer to the Victorian feminine ideal. She does not adorn herself according to feminine conventions. For instance, she refuses Mary's offer of perfume by saying "I shall not waste eau de Cologne on my handkerchief" (277). Mary, on the other hand, is preoccupied with cultivating a feminine<sup>3</sup> appearance; Agnes reports in a letter that she "caught [Mary] before the glass, trying the effect of seringa . . . in her hair" (285). Maude is further contrasted with Mary and Agnes in a scene where the sisters are embroidering a cover for a lectern, and Maude declines to participate citing a lack of commensurate competence in needlework. When Maude asks Agnes what the symbols of the embroidery mean, Agnes answers by quoting from the Song of Solomon: "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys" (273; *King James Bible*, Solomon 2.1). A typological tradition<sup>4</sup> exists where the Rose of

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the term "feminine" shall refer to Showalter's definition in *A Literature of Their Own*: the conception of essential femininity held by nineteenth-century women writers who "wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalized its assumptions about female nature" ("Towards a Feminist Poetics" 137).

<sup>4</sup> Biblical types, along with paraphrases, were used in this era as an approved methodology for engaging with scripture. Within Christian typological

Sharon and the Lily of the Valley refer to Christ, for example in Robert Herrick's poem "To His Saviour, a Child; A Present by a Child":

GO, pretty child, and bear this flower  
Unto thy little Saviour;  
And tell Him, by that bud now blown,  
He is the Rose of Sharon known. (1-4)

Ann Astell notes that a typological tradition exists in which the Song of Songs is interpreted as the relationship between the Church as the bride, and Christ as the groom (167). However, Mary Dove states that there is also a history of using the language of the Song of Songs within secular literature to express profane love (46). It can also be read as a poem of contentment in sexual or marital partnership, as the speaker can be said to be a woman admiring her lover, and wishing to be together: "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies" (Solomon 2.16). I suggest that Maude, by excluding herself from the needlework offered by her cousins, is symbolically distancing herself from not only such domestic preoccupations, but also the sphere of matrimonial love depicted in the Song of Solomon, in other words, from the life of the Angel in the House.

Maude's distinction from Mary and Agnes also shows how expressed melancholy is Maude's primary defense against the

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hermeneutics, books of the Old Testament, such as the Song of Solomon, have often been read as foreshadowing of events in the New Testament. George Landow gives an example of such typological readings as follows: "A type is an anticipation of Christ. Thus Samson, who sacrificed his life for God's people, partially anticipates Christ, who repeats the action, endowing it with deeper, more complete, more spiritual significance" (22).

pervasiveness of the Angel in the House ideal. Maude is considered austere in style, but does not conceal her cleverness; Mary is the opposite, as she enjoys dressing up and does not seem to have particularly intellectual aspirations. Agnes is clever but she hides it, declaring, “One difference between us is that you are less healthy and far more clever than I am” (273). Agnes, however, is clever enough to write a poem in the “*Bouts rimés*” game, with her sister admitting as much when she puts her forward for the game: “Of course [Maude] would get on capitally, and Agnes might manage very well, and Magdalen can do anything; but it is quite beyond me” (269). Mélody Enjoubault explains that *Bouts rimés* is a poetry game, originating in the aristocratic salons of seventeenth-century France, where each contestant is given the same set of words in a set rhyme scheme and tasked with creating an original poem; it was often played by the Rossetti children when they were young (289). Agnes writes a sonnet that creates the given rhymes into a list of things she would do “Rather than writing”:

        Would that I were a turnip white,  
Or raven black,  
Or miserable hack  
        Dragging a cab from left to right;  
        Or would I were the showman of a sight,  
Or weary donkey with a laden back,  
Or racer in a sack,  
        Or freezing traveller on an Alpine height;

Or would I were straw catching as I drown,  
    (A wretched landsman I who cannot swim,)  
Or watching a lone vessel sink,  
    Rather than writing: I would change my pink  
Gauze for a hideous yellow satin gown  
    With deepcut scalloped edges and a rim. (270)

These *Bouts rimés* poems are meant to be a kind of public performance, as they were intended from the beginning to be “submitted for judgement to the discerning public” (270) of Mary’s birthday party. Maude comments that Agnes’s sonnet is not written in meter (270); William Michael Rossetti (Rossetti’s brother and biographer) remarks, “This was, of course, intentional on Christina’s part, to mark the ineptitude of [Agnes]” (490), presumably to contrast with Maude’s own command of the form. Agnes, aware of having to present socially, chooses to present a self that is reluctant to engage in the spectacle of writing, and possibly her lack of adherence to meter reflects this reluctance rather than literary incompetence. Enjoubault notes that the anaphora of the repeated “or” emphasizes this reluctance in both its persistence and simplistic construction, as if the poet regarded composition to be a chore in which to expend as little effort as possible (298). Agnes’s choice of deriding a “showman of a sight” (5)—deriding, because it is one of the less unpleasant, if still unpleasant things she would rather be than a writer—illustrates her reluctance to be the center of attention or the producer of a show. This self-effacement is, of course, in keeping with the Angel in the

House.

This championing of self-negation over gauche showmanship extends to the final lines beyond the volta of “Rather than writing” (12) wherein the indignity of writing is greater than even the graceless ostentation of “a hideous yellow satin gown / With deepcut scolloped edges and a rim” (13–14). She even puts the humble profession of “hack” (a hackney cab driver) or the animal “donkey” (which has a name with a more comical sound than “horse”) above the shamefulness of writing. There is also a gendered element to this reluctance, as “hack” (3), “showman” (5), “racer in a sack” (7), “traveller on an Alpine height” (8), and “landsman” (10) arguably all conjure up men. Rossetti is working from a tradition of Romantic, mostly male poets; Agnes’s gendering of the professions in her poem may be an indication of what Adeline Johns-Putra calls a masculinist conception of poetry and writing pervasive in this time (104), again recalling Rossetti’s anxiety that poetic ambition was unfeminine. Yet, while Agnes chooses to emphasize that she does not like writing and, by extension, is not a “writer,” it is clear from her composition that she has at least enough literary aptitude to write a thematically coherent and humorous, if not scanning, sonnet. She does not, however, choose to develop her talent the way Maude has, and judging from her attitude in her poem, it seems unlikely she ever will.

While Maude’s *Bouts rimés* sonnet is not about writing, it does deal with socially transgressive ideas:

Some ladies dress in muslin full and white,

Some gentlemen in cloth succinct and black;  
Some patronise a dog-cart, some a hack,  
    Some think a painted clarence only right.  
    Youth is not always such a pleasing sight,  
Witness a man with tassels on his back;  
Or woman in a great-coat like a sack  
    Towering above her sex with horrid height.  
If all the world were water fit to drown  
    There are some whom you would not teach to swim,  
    Rather enjoying if you saw them sink;  
    Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink,  
With roses and geraniums on their gown: —  
    Go to the Bason, poke them o'er the rim.' (271)

The octave begins with a normative worldview and gradually introduces elements of the grotesque, ending with black humor. The poem can be read as melancholic, as black humor can be an ironic manifestation of melancholy, or a satirizing of the absurd situation of the powers of policing, social pressures. The first two lines of “ladies” (1) dressed in white and “gentlemen” (2) dressed in black as in a wedding conjure images of heteronormative matrimony, the fundamental family unit upon which the Angel-of-the-House ideal is realized. Jerome McGann asserts that this particular line also implies that women who have an alternative vocation and sense of worth, enough to give up the material comforts of marriage, will find being a housewife intolerable (245). The reader knows

from the very first poem included in *Maude*, that the speaker is willing to “[drain] the lees” (14), that Maude thinks of herself as having such a mission in life. This superiority of Maude’s thinking is reflected in her superiority of form; Enjoubault asserts that the sonnet is clearly meant to be better than Agnes’s, with a more complex construction than the simple parallelisms of the conjunction “or” in the latter’s sonnet, and a stricter adherence to the octave-sestet structure, as if emphasizing Maude’s literary competence over Agnes’s (299).

This critique of social norms then shifts from gender to class; the usage of the words ladies and gentlemen instead of “women” or “men” evokes entrenched class- and gender-related codes of conduct, a theme that continues in the next two lines. The hierarchy of “dog-cart” (3), “hack” (3), and “clarence” (4) suggest socioeconomic hierarchies of the laboring, bourgeoisie, and aristocratic classes respectively. The words “patronise” (3) and “just right” (4) imply an overall smoothness in the functioning of this normative, socioeconomic order. There is a turn in line five—arguably the poem has two *voltas*, one in the middle of the octave and one in the beginning of the sestet—with the speaker beginning to describe grotesque sights such as a young man “with tassels on his back” (6) and a young woman with “horrid height” (8). The young man is vainly preoccupied with his appearance; he is probably effeminate and possibly even homosexual. Tara MacDonald notes that there was a “crisis of masculinity” during the Victorian era when the social roles of men were in flux, creating an atmosphere of anxiety concerning the newly uncertain

place of men in society (19). John Tosh states that this was partly brought on by the rise of the Angel-in-the-House ideal, as women were seen to dominate the domestic sphere, threatening men's place in the family hierarchy (108). The young man may be interpreted as an example of such social anxiety concerning the shifting of masculine ideals, and understood, therefore, as a poetic subversion of the heteronormative order of the ladies in white and gentlemen in black. The young woman is—if not a spinster—someone who would struggle to procure a match because of her stature. She may represent the phenomenon of the “redundant woman,” coined by W. R. Greg after the 1851 census revealed that over two-fifths of England's women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried (Greg 12; Mackinnon 284). The speaker has, within the space of an octave, moved from the Victorian-normative ladies and gentleman to the grotesquely effeminate man and “redundant” woman, emphasizing the presence of Victorian society's outsiders. Such a reading would imply poetic transgression on Maude's part; instead of concealing these misfits and, therefore, perpetuating the dominant narratives of Victorian society, she is exposing them to the consciences of her bourgeois acquaintances. As such, the sonnet enables these marginal Others to transgress into the respectable and normative boundaries of Mary and Agnes's middle-class home. This is in line with critics' observations of Rossetti's marked skepticism regarding the institution of marriage, particularly in its unequal treatment of women (Spaive 54).

The volta at the beginning of the sestet seems, at first, to suggest

it is the young man in tassels or the tall young woman who deserves to be drowned. But the one who does get “[poked] . . . o’er the rim” (14) of the Bason is “Certain old ladies dressed in girlish pink” (12). While these old ladies may be further examples of “redundant women,” they may also represent the Angel in the House. A clue is the “pink” (12) of their dresses; in Agnes’s poem, it is a color that represents demure, normative beauty over the vulgar ostentation of yellow satin. While Agnes and Maude are not referencing each other’s poems within the story, Rossetti, by having Maude’s poem read after Agnes, may have intended this color and its symbolism in Agnes’s sonnet to echo in the memory of the reader in Maude’s. The “roses and geraniums” (13) that adorn their gowns are also flowers that are common in English gardens and households, a possible further allusion to the old ladies’ adherence to approved domestic Victorian mores; indeed, Ruskin used the English garden as a metaphor for English female domesticity in his essay “Of Queen’s Gardens.”<sup>5</sup> Another clue is that, at a later point in the story, when this sonnet is rejected from inclusion in a friend’s scrapbook, Maude conjectures that it is because the acquaintance in question “has some reprehensible old lady in her family, and so might feel hurt at my Lynch-law” (273). This connects, in the reader’s mind, the old lady in the sonnet and the old ladies in Victorian families, or the matriarchal Angels in the Houses. Maude, in

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<sup>5</sup> “This is wonderful—oh, wonderful!—to see her, with every innocent feeling fresh within her, go out in the morning into her garden to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers, and lift their heads when they are drooping, with her happy smile upon her face, and no cloud upon her brow, because there is a little wall around her place of peace” (Ruskin 165).

this sonnet, is effectively doing what Woolf described doing in her essay: killing the Angel in the House.

This “killing” of the Angel in the House must be read through the narrative context of the sonnet as well as its content. The sonnet comes right after Agnes’s in the story, creating a deliberately contrasting juxtaposition between the two. Also contextually, the sonnets are “battling” each other, as one is to be chosen to be the best in a competition. The narrator of the story seems to be creating an argument between the two perspectives, that of Agnes’s Angel in the House, and Maude’s murderous social subversive. Gilbert and Gubar, in their discussion of the anxiety of influence in women writers of the nineteenth century, identify a narrative pattern in which creative women are pitted against the social pressures of the Angel in the House. This is often artistically represented as a clash of violence, for example in “Little Snow White,” which “dramatizes the essential but equivocal relationship between the angel-woman and the monster-woman” (36). The “demonic” creative woman must do battle with the docile Angel in the House, for the latter’s influence is harming the former:

Snow White represents precisely the ideal of “contemplative purity” . . . that could quite literally kill the Queen. An angel in the house of myth, Snow White is not only a child but (as female angels always are) childlike, docile, submissive . . . But the Queen, adult and demonic, plainly wants a life of “significant action,” by definition an “unfeminine” life of stories and story-

telling. And therefore, to the extent that Snow White, as her daughter, is a part of herself, she wants to kill the Snow White *in herself*, the angel who would keep deeds and dramas out of her house. (39)

This narrative pattern in which a creative woman considered “demonic” or “unfeminine” who must “kill the Snow White [or Angel in the House] *in herself*” is precisely the “battle” or conflict being played out within and between Maude and Agnes’s sonnets. In Agnes’s sonnet, female propriety is being threatened by this pressure to write, because writing is an act perceived as unfeminine and masculine. In Maude’s sonnet, it is female propriety that must be killed. Maude’s speaker kills it by pushing the Angel in the House—here the character of an old lady created by her, essentially “the Snow White *in herself*”—into a pond to drown.

Maude’s black humor in the birthday party sonnet is an ironic usage of melancholy as an “angel-killing” tool for self-protection, literary productivity, and transgression. But a more straightforward use of melancholy as a “weapon” against the Angel of the House appears in a poem she gives to her cousin Agnes to pass on to Miss Savage, who asked for some verses to be put in her album:

She sat and sang away  
By the green margin of a stream,  
Watching the fishes leap and play  
Beneath the glad sun-beam.

I sat and wept alway  
Beneath the moon's most shadowy beam,  
Watching the blossoms of the may  
Weep leaves into the stream.

I wept for memory;  
She sang for hope that is so fair;—  
My tears were swallowed by the sea;  
Her songs died on the air. (273–74)

The name of the recipient of this poem, Miss Savage, carries a hint of what Rossetti feels about the kind of person she represents: a stereotypical nineteenth-century middle-class young woman of conventional femininity. This characterization is further evidenced in the later tea-party scene where she implicitly excludes Maude from the normative by fussing over the latter's artistic interest, making Maude feel "attacked on either hand with questions concerning her verses" (279). In this poem, there are two women: one who "sang alway" (1) and sits in the sun, and the speaker who "wept alway" (5) and sits in "the moon's most shadowy beam" (6). They are possibly looking at the same stream, but the woman in the sun sees a bright, delightful scene whereas for the speaker the scene is one of "blossoms of the May / Weep leaves into the stream" (7-8), a vision that is a portent of lost youth or death. Theo Dombrowski notes that the antithesis of the second stanza creates contrast with the first, emphasizing the distance between the two ideals (71). Indeed, Winston Weathers reads

this poem as an illustration of a duality that cannot be reconciled, of two selves of the same person that “sit by the margin of the stream, but sit . . . in separation” (85). But it is the speaker’s vision that is proven right at the end, as both the speaker’s tears and the other woman’s song eventually disappear from the world, both sadness and happiness being shown to have no real meaning on an existential scale, a theme Maude will later on return to using her paraphrasing of Ecclesiastes. It is interesting that Maude has chosen this particular poem for Miss Savage, as if implying that her time, too, shall pass. Maude’s choice of a melancholic poem to give to Miss Savage (and Agnes) signals artistic depth, but Maude’s expression of melancholy through the poem is also a defense against the influence of the Angel in the House, or Victorian gender norms, on her work.

## **The Melancholy of the Nun**

Magdalen is a peer of Agnes and Mary, whom Maude becomes acquainted with at Mary’s birthday party in Part One. During this era, the notion of becoming a nun was a new possibility for Anglican women, as Tractarian leaders in 1845 established the first post-Reformation convent in England. It is important to bear in mind that a pervasive sense of the Victorian “Woman’s Mission,” as represented in the triptych by George Elgar Hicks of the same title, largely concerned caring for families—the subtitles of each painting being “Guide to Childhood,” “Companion of Manhood,” and “Comfort of Old Age” (Andres 29–30). For certain

religiously inclined, trained and educated “redundant women,” the Anglican sisterhoods offered a viable alternative life mission (Vicinus 46). Magdalen eventually takes holy orders to become an Anglican nun, and at one point suggests that this may be a possible vocation for Maude as well. In Chapter Three of Part Three, Maude asks Agnes a hypothetical question: “if you could not be yourself, but must become one of us three . . . would you change with Sister Magdalen, with Mary, or with me?” (294). Maude is really asking herself this question: do I become a nun, a wife, or a writer? If Mary presents a successful example of a fledgling Angel in the House, Magdalen offers another path, that of “pale Sister Maude” (285) as Magdalen describes it to Agnes.

Magdalen is a central character in the story in terms of her presence in or behind the scenes. Readers are continuously informed of her off-stage progress as a nun, and Maude, on several occasions, muses upon Magdalen’s choice of vocation in a manner that suggests she considers it a viable option. It is highly probable that active Anglican sisterhoods, where service to God was expressed through the social gospel—as nurses, missionaries and teachers—would have been attractive for religious women with socially outgoing inclinations. Indeed, far from being a form of confinement, active convent orders in nineteenth-century England provided an alternative vocation for women who were more interested in religious contemplation or social service than matrimony and motherhood. Martha Vicinus states that Anglican orders for women “were one of the most important women’s communities in the nineteenth

century” in how they “empowered women, validating women’s work and values in a world that seemed materialistic, godless, and male” (83). In *Maude*, Magdalen is portrayed as a nun visibly working in the community. While her cousin Mary finds the idea repellent, Maude herself supposes that women who take holy orders are content in their choice: “I can perceive that those are very happy who are [nuns]” (275).

Therefore, Maude regards the life of a nun as an aspirational ideal, but with more ambivalence than in her repugnant attitude towards the Angel in the House. This skepticism is reflected in the important “Three Nuns” poems, a three-part lyric poem, which Maude designates as epithalamium despite the fact that it is not celebratory or discussing marriage. Instead, the poem consists of the internal thoughts of three nun characters with differing motives for joining the order. Within the text, Maude informs Agnes that the second nun stands for “Mary, had she mistaken her vocation” and “the third is Magdalen, of course” (287). While some critics may agree with Andrew and Catherine Belsey who read “Three Nuns” as an omnibus of three women mired in “the lack which is their tragic but chosen destiny, the deliberate construction of a place of non-being” (38), it would still be difficult to argue as to whether the nun in the third poem is so unhappy. In that section of “Three Nuns” that is inspired by Magdalen, the speaker contrasts the meagerness of the secular world with the heavenly reward that will come to God’s workers:

When Earth shall pass away with all

Her pride and pomp of sin,

The City builded without hands

Shall safely shut me in.

All the rest is but vanity

Which others strive to win:

Where their hopes end my joys begin. (3:36–42, 292)

D'Amico notes that Rossetti, through the third nun, is speaking of the Last Things, directly quoting Revelation 22:17 in the final line of the poem: “The Spirit and the Bride say, come” (3:84, 293; D'Amico 57). The Book of Revelation talks of the passing of all things on Earth and the coming of heaven, and about how the devout and wise shall inherit heaven on Earth. Consequently, the speaker is saying that the pursuit of all else is foolish vanity. Magdalen represents those who live lives of hope deferred for such future happiness.

However, despite her approval of the institution, Maude considers herself to be unfit for “such a life” and generally “too unwell for regularity” (275). There is a fleeting moment before her accident when she seems to seriously consider a religious vocation, asking aloud: “Mamma, should you mind my being a Nun?” (286). However, her mother dismisses this idea as if it were a passing fancy. In fact, Rossetti herself is thought to have considered, however briefly, taking orders as an Anglican nun; her older sister was a nun in the All Saints Sisterhood (Marsh 409) and there is some, if not definitive, evidence that Rossetti herself was an “outer sister” (D'Amico 44). She also had substantial experience working with nuns, being a volunteer at the Mary Magdalen

Penitentiary for Fallen Women on Highgate Hill for approximately a decade from the mid 1850s (Harrison 418). However, she seems to have rejected the vocation in a similar fashion as Mrs Foster had. Marsh quotes a letter from Rossetti to an acquaintance, where Rossetti says, “So you think I once trembled on ‘The Convent Threshold’? Not seriously ever, tho’ I went through a sort of romantic impression on the subject like many young people. No, I feel no drawing in that direction” (413). D’Amico also quotes from this letter in her examination of Rossetti and her thoughts concerning convent life, concluding that while Rossetti approved of the Anglican orders as a worthy, even superior alternative to a life of matrimony and motherhood, she herself felt no motivation to participate in it (66). It seems to require a particular sensibility for service and activity, as hinted at in Magdalen’s *Bout rimés* entry at Mary’s birthday party:

I fancy the good fairies dressed in white,  
Glancing like moon-beams through the shadows black;  
Without much work to do for king or hack.  
Training perhaps some twisted branch aright;  
Or sweeping faded Autumn leaves from sight  
To foster embryo life; or binding back  
Stray tendrils; or in ample bean-pod sack  
Bringing wild honey from the rocky height;  
Or fishing for a fly lest it should drown;  
Or teaching water-lily heads to swim,

Fearful that sudden rain might make them sink;  
Or dyeing the pale rose a warmer pink;  
Or wrapping lilies in their leafy gown,  
Yet letting the white peep beyond the rim.— (270)

Tess Cosslett notes that the poem is “dutifully spiritual” in both its otherworldly theme and the ministry of the fairies (131). Enjoubault observes that it is a better sonnet than Agnes’s in terms of its more regular adherence to meter and its more unified tone partly due to the alliteration of “f” sounds throughout (298). This perhaps reflects the steadiness or stability conferred by the religious selflessness—an outward vector from the ego through the aid of religiously proscribed activity and contemplation—exhibited by the fairies. Indeed, the overall tone of the sonnet is like a fairy story or fantasy, perhaps a reflection of how otherworldly the ideal Magdalen lives by is; the ideal, since otherworldly, is beyond the confines of the ego. The speaker in Magdalen’s poem aspires to be one of the “good fairies dressed in white” (1), like an angel carrying out God’s work on Earth. These fairies (or angels) do the unseen work of the world, straightening twisted branches (4), fostering “embryo life” into birth (6), saving drowning flies (9), or nursing “the pale rose a warmer pink” (12). All of these deeds can be read as metaphors for work undertaken by nuns or volunteers, such as nursing the sick, tending the young, or helping the needy. The sonnet is thus a catalog of the social work of religious persons. The volta—if it can be called one—comes in the last line, “letting the white peep beyond the rim” (14), a hint of the

white or pure virtue that the fairies or angels or nuns live by, hidden in the good works they do. The fairies do not have the kind of character readers would associate with Maude, and the sonnet itself is not one Maude would write herself. This is because it is the opposite of melancholic, as melancholy tends to be recursive or “inward” as opposed to the “outward” vector of active religious modes; this opposite vector of melancholy and the role of religion in its mechanism within Rossetti’s poetics shall be discussed further in Chapter Three. Meanwhile, the emotional distance between Magdalen’s and Maude’s sonnets can be seen as the distance between their characters. Maude is not like Magdalen, and, therefore, she cannot make the same choices.

A life of glad service is not what Maude wishes. What Maude really craves seems to be solitude, or, more specifically, an escape from the pressures of social performance. In the first section of “Three Nuns,” the one presumably based on Maude herself,<sup>6</sup> an unhappy nun feels dissatisfied with life within the convent walls and yearns to be a child again, playing freely by herself in the woods. The poem ends thus:

There, while yet a child,  
I thought I could live as in a dream,  
Secret, neither found nor sought:  
Till the lilies on the stream,  
Pure as virgin purity,

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<sup>6</sup> While Maude protests that “The first Nun no one can suspect of being myself” (287), Diane D’Amico notes that “her protests merely serve to draw attention to the similarity between her own world-weariness and that of the first nun,” effectively linking herself to that speaker (55).

Would seem scarce too pure for me: —

Ah, but that can never be. (289)

What Maude's speaker seeks in this return to childhood is "purity" (5), a state before she was defiled by the world, which she has tried to regain by entering the nunnery. Her failure implies Maude's awareness of the nun's profession as being unsuited for her needs, of not being able to provide her with the "purity" she seeks. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "purity" as "state or quality of being morally or spiritually pure; sinlessness; freedom from ritual pollution; ceremonial cleanness; innocence; chastity" ("Purity"). In the context of the story, this purity of "sinlessness" may be interpreted as Maude's state before her discovery of the vanity of asserted melancholy, relating to a time when she was innocent of "display and poetry and acting" (273).

Indeed, the nun in Maude's section of "Three Nuns" hints at an escape from performance that has failed to result in the succor she seeks:

When my yellow hair was curled

Though men saw and called me fair,

I was weary in the world

Full of vanity and care.

Gold was left behind, curls shorn

When I came here; that same morn

Made a bride no gems adorn.

Here wrapped in my spotless veil,

Curtained from intruding eyes,  
I whom prayers and fasts turn pale  
Wait the flush of Paradise.  
But the vigil is so long  
My heart sickens:— sing thy song,  
Blithe bird that canst do no wrong. (1:22–42, 288–89)

The nun's declaration of the weariness of performance—"I was weary in the world / Full of vanity and care" (3–4)—is followed by an account of an escape into the holy orders, and now she is "Curtained from intruding eyes" (9) or the need to perform a character. "Character" here is Riede's usage of the word, a form of internalized social conscience in the form of a limiting, policing persona, an "introjection of the hegemonic cultural values of the age" (7). The nun in this section discovers, however, that she is still performing a character; she is trying to conform to the character of a religious exemplar, "wrapped in my spotless veil" (8) or maintaining a certain appearance, and participating in "prayers and fasts" (10) in order to forget her life outside of the convent. In other words, she has only escaped one character only to entrap herself in another. The "Blithe bird that canst do no wrong" can do no wrong because, as an animal, it is free from the motive of performance. Similarly, a child playing alone in the woods is innocent of any pressure to perform or be a character. Maude is, therefore, aware that convent life will not enable her happiness. She intuits that being a nun would be as confining as being an Angel in the House. While she uses melancholy as a "weapon" to "kill" the Angel in

the House, in “Three Nuns,” she uses it to illuminate the performance aspects of religious service in order to think through the consequences of choosing and rejecting a conventual life.

# **Chapter Two: Ecclesiastes and the Productivity of Vanity**

## **Melancholy and the Sin of Vanity**

Maude resists the pressures to conform to the “Victorian sense of the finite socially constructed ‘character’” (Riede 8)—again, the “characters” here being the Angel in the House and the nun—by asserting her identity and legitimacy as a writer through signaling her melancholy in her poetry. However, despite her artistic satisfaction from writing such verses, it seems that Maude feels guilt over her literary expressions of melancholy. In Chapter Three of Part One, she remarks: “How I envy you . . . you who live in the country, and are exactly what you appear, and never wish for what you do not possess. I am sick of display and poetry and acting” (273). This brief remark reveals that Maude thinks of her work as engaging in mendacious “display” and “acting.” Beyond this comment, Maude’s guilt is further articulated in Chapter III of Part Two, where Agnes discovers Maude to be suffering from feelings of religious unworthiness due to her writing. Maude even declares to Agnes that she will not take the Eucharist the next day during Christmas services, and stops her cousin from admonishing her: “Whatever your faults may be . . . you are trying to correct them; your own conscience tells you that. But I am not trying. No one will say that I cannot avoid putting myself forward and displaying my verses” (282). She believes that, if she were more moral, she would not show her writing to anyone (or perhaps let others

know she writes at all).

Gilbert and Gubar, in explaining Maude's reluctance and guilt, note: "here is the worst, the most unforgivable sin, the ultimate female sin of vanity. Whether literally or figuratively, a woman must never become enamored of her own image in nature or art" (552). Maude clearly regards her allowing of the circulation of her verses to be an act of vanity. The word "vanity" is key, as its Judeo-Christian connotations relate to the spiritual dimensions of Maude's agony, and to her subsequent feelings of guilt. Here, the word "vanity" refers to "[the] quality of being personally vain; high opinion of oneself; self-conceit and desire for admiration," but can also refer to "[that] which is vain, futile, or worthless; that which is of no value or profit" ("Vanity"). Vanity in *Maude* appears to be a combination of both, as the composition of poetry for the admiration of others is considered a "futile" act, because such selfishness and inflated sense of self-importance traps Maude within her own prideful ego and distances her from God. Rossetti's own conception of melancholy hints at why Maude may feel the display of melancholy or the poetic persona to be so problematic. Roe contends that while Rossetti considered melancholy to be a "stylistic choice," she differed with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in their reverence of Keats' melancholy because she was more ambivalent about utilizing melancholy in her own work, as it conflicted with her religious asceticism (42). Gilbert and Gubar also contrast Rossetti's attitude towards being an artist with Keats's, asserting that Rossetti's negative "consideration of 'vanity'" was fundamental to

her self-conception as “a fragile, vainly costumed lady,” while Keats was imbued with the “masculine certainty” of being “a lord of creation” (553). Therefore, it is possible to read Maude’s guilt, which is yet another aspect of Maude’s melancholy, as resulting from the clash between her assertions of artistry and Victorian religious norms.

The term “vanity” is prominently featured in the two sonnets that come just before the conversation with Agnes mentioned above, and these two sonnets illuminate Maude’s conflict between her desire to be an artist and her identity as a devout Christian. Maude has written these sonnets to express the guilt she feels concerning her “vanity,” or her display of literary ambition. The first of these sonnets that Maude shows Agnes is a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes:

Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith,  
All things are vanity. The eye and ear  
Cannot be filled with what they see and hear:  
Like early dew, or like the sudden breath  
Of wind, or like the grass that withereth  
Is man, tossed to and fro by hope and fear:  
So little joy hath he, so little cheer,  
Till all things end in the long dust of death.  
Today is still the same as yesterday,  
To-Morrow also even as one of them;  
And there is nothing new under the sun.  
Until the ancient race of time be run

The old thorns shall grow out of the old stem,

And morning shall be cold and twilight grey.— (280)

Paraphrase of the scriptures was one of the methods nineteenth-century women writers used to interpret and meditate upon theological themes (Landow 22; Taylor 12). This melancholic poem is about the existential angst of having no escape from the inevitability of death on Earth. Ludlow contextualizes the poem's melancholy within the point of Maude's narrative, locating the speaker in "the place of uphill struggle rather than at the peak of a grace-inflected understanding" (66); therefore, it is a poem representing the conflict itself, and not its resolution. It is relentless with intertextual references to Ecclesiastes, most notably the first line of the sonnet with the second verse of the book: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity" (Ecc. 1.2). It is clear that Maude intended for readers to pick up the allusion and incorporate its meaning into the story. Ecclesiastes is a book of the Bible that explores the meaning of life. In the end, it determines that, while wisdom is laudable, it is not eternal, and suggests humans should live pious lives enjoying the gifts of God and keeping the commandments. It is also a melancholic work, for as Maude's sonnet suggests, it talks about how everything must end, including nature and humanity itself. Concomitantly, "there is nothing new under the sun" (11), which is a rephrasing of "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun" (1.14). This reference in particular seems to be pointing to a thematically relevant feature of Ecclesiastes, towards a melancholic passage on the worthlessness of wisdom:

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. [. . .] For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. (1.13–14; 1.18)

At the end of wisdom there is only grief, and any attempt at wisdom is nothing more than “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Through her pointed allusions to Ecclesiastes, and her presentation of this sonnet to Agnes while simultaneously castigating herself for putting herself forward and displaying her verses, Maude is indirectly declaring that her poetry writing is an act of vanity. Her work has been nothing more than “old thorns” that are “growing out of the old stem” (13), not even procreative flowers but sterile thorns, pointing to her belief that her work is futile.

There is, however, a possibility that this sonnet is more than simply a depiction of futility in this world, but is also a message of hope. The surface voice of the poem may be melancholic, but the underlying voice is one of resolute control and persistence, again, because of the exacting form. As discussed in the previous chapter, Keble approved of the sonnet form because of its poetic utility for modulating emotion; the melancholy of the poem is present, but contained by the measured meter and rhyme. There is an overall iambic pentameter, accentuated by spondaic feet in key melancholic images such as “long dust” (8), “old

thorns” (13) or “old stem” (13). This controlled use of the sonnet form indicates that underneath the melancholy and existential despair is a speaker in control of her emotion.

A sense of artistic control can also be detected in the complex intertextual elements of the sonnet. Maude seems to be incorporating the existential theme of Ecclesiastes with the lines “all things end in the long dust of death” (8), which reminds readers that eventually we shall all perish. However, Diane D’Amico demonstrates that this particular poem, while mostly based on the voice of the preacher in Ecclesiastes, also “weaves various biblical texts together to convey her own message” (26)—such as First Corinthians, the Psalms, and Revelations—in order to link her poem with scripture (27). While D’Amico mentions lines 2–3 as referencing the St Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man”; 1 Cor. 2.9; D’Amico 27), the twelfth line, “the ancient race of time be run,” also notably echoes the same book of the Bible:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things . . . But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9.24–27)

Maude has deliberately directed the reader to these particular verses, and so the reason why bears examination. A clue is the word “temperate,”

which contrasts from the gloom, or possible rage, of the existential melancholy of Ecclesiastes and “Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith.” The First Corinthians verses pertain to self-control, and the need to maintain a state of being “temperate” or to “keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” lest one becomes a “castaway.” The precise form of Maude’s sonnet possibly alludes to this sense of control described in First Corinthians. Therefore, encoded within the melancholy, is a voice of faith that keeps to formalities and practices, or exactly what she has “preached to others.” Thus, the discipline required to compete in a race could mean both her religiously prescriptive poetry and her scriptural “preaching” by which she exhorts others to live by.

The second sonnet she shows Agnes extends this underlying prescriptive theme. It, too, on the surface is a narrative of the spiritual transcendence denied to the speaker, with some lines of self-condemnation at the end:

I listen to the holy antheming  
That riseth in thy walls continually,  
What while the organ pealeth solemnly  
And white-robed men and boys stand up to sing.  
I ask my heart with a sad questioning:  
‘What lov’st thou here?’ and my heart answers me:  
‘Within the shadows of this sanctuary  
To watch and pray is a most blessed thing.’  
To watch and pray, false heart? it is not so:

Vanity enters with thee, and thy love  
Soars not to Heaven, but grovelleth below.  
Vanity keepeth guard, lest good should reach  
Thy hardness; not the echoes from above  
Can rule thy stubborn feelings or can teach. — (281)

The sestet beginning with the volta at line nine gives us a self-condemnation of her vanity, that her “false heart” makes her “grovelleth” for attention and approbation in the secular world as opposed to letting her soar into heaven. This image of soaring, of movement outward, recalls Isobel Armstrong’s comments about Victorian expressive theory: “Expansion, movement outwards, the breaking of barriers, is the essence of poetry and the essence of *healthy* poetry” (340). “Soars” is notable in such imagery of outward movement, of a “healthy” speaker. It is contrasted against the speaker’s immobility as implied by “the shadows of this sanctuary” (7), which may be within a church but for the word “shadows” conjuring a place of solitary enclosure, and being “below” (12) where “Vanity keepeth guard” (13) as if a jailer to a cell. The speaker is prevented from moving out of this cell and into heaven, and trapped due to her vanity within the prison of her ego. Armstrong paraphrases Arthur Hallam (1811–1833) by saying, “the movement outwards into ‘energetic love for the beautiful’ was a moral activity because it educated the self in a liberation from the bonds of the ego” (360). In this sonnet, the sin of vanity prevents the speaker from engaging in the “moral activity” of moving outwards from the ego.

Similar imagery of “movement outwards” can be read from Maude’s other melancholic poetry, such as in the following poem written after her accident:

Then in my wrath I broke the bough  
That I had tended with such care,  
Hoping its scent should fill the air:  
I crushed the eggs, not heeding how  
Their ancient promise had been fair: —  
I would have vengeance now. (13–18, 295)

The desire for movement outward, or freedom, is embedded in the line: “Hoping its scent should fill the air” (15) in the image of the scent diffusing into the air. The eggs also reflect this desire as they had “ancient promise” (17) to hatch into birds and fly into the air, not to mention the connotations in eggs of creativity and growth.

Agnes asks whether the sonnet “I listen to the holy antheming” was composed after attending a service at St Andrew’s, which readers understand to be a High Anglican cathedral. Maude had previously introduced its services as “a perfect service; or at any rate perhaps the nearest English approach to vocal perfection” (275). Maude admits later on to Agnes that she had been going to St Andrews at the cost of neglecting her own parish church, presumably because she was enraptured by the sensuous music. Elsewhere in the novella, religious music is seen to have a significantly positive effect on Maude. At Mrs Strawdy’s tea party, her only enjoyment is Caroline’s singing of some simple and

religious airs for the group: “Maude felt consoled for all the contrarities of the day” (279). These incidents and the sonnet above suggest that music has the power to help Maude transcend her self and move outside of her ego towards freedom; it should also be noted that under Armstrong’s expressive theory, music enables escape from different confines of the ego: “Music, or the ‘air,’ literally circulates in and between the group and the congregation, canceling the fixities of gender and social division and releasing the stony categories from their rigidity . . . expressive song reconfigures relationships” (339). The religious aspect of the music suggests that Maude’s ideal of freedom is spiritual—a freedom of the soul. In other words, it is a freedom from the mortality of the body, and, thus, from earthly matters.

Maude perceives her poetry as keeping her from the freedom of heaven; yet, she is unable to sacrifice it. She interprets her inability to mortify her literary ambitions as deeply engrained vanity, as opposed to a legitimate desire for artistic expression and identification. As a compromise between her worldly ambitions and religion, she declares that she will not receive the Eucharist so that she is not a hypocrite. Agnes subsequently accuses Maude of going against her religious duties when she questions, “You cannot mean that for the present you will indulge vanity and display; that you will court admiration and applause; that you will take your fill of pleasure” (283). Agnes is, in effect, voicing Maude’s fear and reason for her guilt, that her poetry is precisely an act of indulging in “vanity and display.” Maude’s reaction is to reiterate her

position and burst into tears until she is left alone, for she cannot recant her decision. She is at an impasse; she cannot give up her art for her religion, nor can she give up her religion for her art.

Maude's choice to forego the Eucharist is, on the surface, a pious action, a refusal to "not profane Holy Things" (281). Underneath however, the decision is also an indication of her will to preserve her artistic persona. She will not abandon her writing or being a poet; she would rather give up the Eucharist. This decision is an expression of her artistic agency, an agency that is, at this stage, in direct conflict with her religious values. Later on, Maude (and Rossetti herself) will find a way to better accommodate the poetics of melancholy into her religious principles, but, until Part Two, we are given a portrait of the artist as a young woman who is struggling to integrate her creative desire with the cultural expectations of female modesty and self-denial.

It is appropriate that Part Two ends with this decision and the original hymn "Thank God, thank God, we do believe" written by Rossetti herself (477). Maude has been sobbing over her difficult decision, and, when the clock strikes twelve to announce Christmas Day, the waits (carolers) outside begin to sing this hymn, and it eventually lulls Maude to slumber. Evidently, music still has the power of transport for Maude, and, because she falls asleep comforted rather than tortured by the content of the lyrics, readers understand that the hymn functions not as admonishment but consolation. The content of the lyrics are simple, a rejoicing at the coming of Christ. Significantly, with forty lines, this hymn

is the longest single poem to be included in “Maude” (“Three Nuns,” while longer, is more of a sequence of poems). The novella presents the entire hymn, as if encouraging readers to experience for themselves the devotional song’s quieting influence on Maude. The effect is the lulling of an atmosphere that has been previously overwrought by Maude’s “selfish” declarations to Agnes, and the subsequent emotional release of tears. It is as if Rossetti, by inserting a complete hymn of her own making—instead of using an established hymn, or simply mentioning the Christmas waits singing outside—consoles her own heroine in an act of mercy and understanding.

The consoling nature of the hymn is, in fact, a common feature of the form. J. R. Watson states that hymns are notable for their regular rhythmic structure, and their patterns are, in many ways, more creatively enabling than being restrictive, allowing the hymn composer to “use the stress patterns of the tune and meter to provide a strong base, on which they build in subtle and sensitive ways” (25). This feature is similar to the central idea of this thesis, in which deliberate control enables the modulation and calibration of affective powers to productive effect. Further illumination may be gained from Blair’s argument that, in the Victorian era, “the poetic form” was “shorthand for the poet’s beliefs and allegiance” (10). In other words, the level of adherence to form corresponded to the level of adherence to religious faith, that the more regular the meter, the more regular the faith. Additionally, in *Maude*, the hymn also represents the faith of the community—it is, literally, sung by a

community—and Maude finds herself both distanced from and yet yearning for it. The words “Let us kneel down with one accord / And render thanks unto the Lord” (284; 35–36) at the end of the hymn are prescriptive, giving Maude an external vector to escape the bounds of her ego, which enables her to fall asleep. Thus, coupled with her response to the religious music played at Mrs Strawdy’s tea party, the effect of the hymn is a foreshadow of the solution to Maude’s dilemma.

This poem is also distinguished from the other verses in the story by the fact that it is a hymn. There are certain formal implications to this fact. As a hymn, it is written in the long meter hymn form of iambic tetrameters (eight syllables per line to be matched with an appropriate melody) with an *aabb* rhyme scheme (“Common measure”). The iambic tetrameter of the long measure has less tension and is, consequently, more soothing than the more popular form of common measure, which consists of alternating iambic tetrameters and trimeters and an *abab* rhyme scheme. Both the meter and the rhyme scheme of the long measure contribute to its stability, which is consequently soothing to the reader. The long-meter iambic tetrameter hymn form is more symmetrical and stable than the iambic tetrameter-trimeter common meter one, as the rhythmic tension of the former is completed in two lines (couplets). In contrast, common meter hymns require four lines (quatrains) to create an even number of feet (seven feet producing fourteen beats) in order to resolve the rhythmic tension brought on by the “missing” foot at the end of the first trimeter:

When I am dead, my dearest,

Sing no sad songs for me;  
Plant thou no roses at my head,  
Nor shady cypress tree: (“Song,” 1–4, 52)

The above example demonstrates how in a hymnic stanza, the iambic tetrameter-trimeter combination creates tension in the rhythm by a feeling of an absence of a foot at the end of the trimeter, and requires at least a quatrain to resolve the arc of tension created by the meter and the rhyme. In contrast, the iambic tetrameter, being more stable, requires only two lines to stand alone in a couplet:

Thank God, thank God, we do believe;  
Thank God that this is Christmas Eve. (1–2, 283)

Its stability is aided by the *aabb* couplet rhyme scheme, which requires only two lines for resolution, while an *abab* rhyme scheme requires four (or in other cases more than just one quatrain, if the rhyme scheme was, for example, *abcb*, another popular variant of the common measure). Long meter is, overall, a structure that swiftly resolves tension within the space of a couplet instead of extending it over the length of a quatrain. This constant feeling of light tension being resolved over the course of twenty couplets, as in the case of “Thank God, thank God, we do believe,” consequently has a soothing effect on the listener.

Aside from these formal implications, the fact that the hymn is being sung on Christmas Eve brings out another meaning from its otherwise simple lyrics:

‘Let us kneel down with one accord

And render thanks unto the Lord:

For unto us a Child is born

Upon this happy Christmas morn;

For unto us a Son is given,

Firstborn of God and Heir of Heaven.'— (35–40, 284)

The content of the hymn is of rejoicing upon the nativity of Christ, which is appropriate considering that the time in which it is sung within the story is “Christmas morn” (38). Immediately prior to the hymn, Maude had effectively turned herself away from Christ, as she vowed to refuse the Eucharist during Christmas services. The Tractarians viewed “the presence of Christ within the Eucharist as a real, objective presence and not merely a figurative one” (Hill 457), attesting to the importance of the Eucharist within the doctrine. By turning away from the Eucharist, or the presence of God, her eternal soul, which Maude as a Christian associates with her sense of the infinite self, is thus contracted and prevented from moving outward. The hymn, however, sings of the incarnational coming of Emmanuel (“God with us”) and, therefore, of the bridging of the distance between people on Earth and God. Maude’s melancholy here springs from her feelings of division from God, and it is poetry, specifically in the Tractarian privileged form of the hymn, that assuages Maude’s melancholic feelings about being divided or cut off from God with the message of the coming of Christ and its implied reconciliation with God.

## **“A Testimony”: The Productivity of Vanity**

Rossetti was preoccupied with the relationship between vanity and melancholic performance for the duration of her writing career. As Serena Trowbridge has demonstrated, Rossetti used Ecclesiastes as a theme or reference to explore this dilemma in many poems of her oeuvre (63). Especially to the young Rossetti contemplating a literary life at the time of writing *Maude*, the appeal of Ecclesiastes as a guiding text would have been obvious. The attraction of Ecclesiastes lies in how it manages to be both a productively melancholic voice and a religious one at the same time. It is one that works through the different possible goals of life (fame, riches, learning and so on) in order to examine and discard them. This process would have engaged a poetically inclined young person in the process of considering, rejecting, and accepting the different kinds of “characters” or available social roles. In many ways, Ecclesiastes may be viewed as a prototypical melancholic voice of the Judeo-Christian world, preceded by the Stoics or other classical thinkers such as Aristotle, but having greater influence in nineteenth-century England owing to its inclusion in the wide-reaching authorized Bible. Thus, the voice would have been sanctified within the religious traditions of her society, as well as being creatively potent at the same time.

One poem that illuminates Rossetti’s use of Ecclesiastes and helps us think about melancholy and literary productivity is “A Testimony.” It was included in her first collection *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, and is one of the earliest examples of Rossetti using Ecclesiastes to think

through the implications of her work and religion. From beginning to end, this poem is replete with references to Ecclesiastes, inviting readers to make the connection between the themes of the biblical book with the poem itself:

I said of laughter, it is vain.

Of mirth I said, what profits it?

Therefore I found a book, and writ

Therein how ease and also pain,

How health and sickness, everyone

Is vanity beneath the sun. (1-6)

The “book” (3) in question, of course, is Ecclesiastes, and we are listening to the voice of its author. Ecclesiastes itself does not start off with a critique of laughter or mirth; the first mention of a specific, meaningless human activity is labor: “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (1.3). Rossetti does not keep this order, however, perhaps because she is intent in “rewriting” Ecclesiastes to better suit her circumstances; for instance, middle-class women had limited possibilities for labor in the nineteenth century. By beginning with a critique of mirth, Rossetti can embark on reworking a version of Ecclesiastes that is more specific to her own ideas and concerns while still benefitting from the intertextual richness of appropriating the Biblical text. She does, however, comment on the nature of labor in a subsequent stanza:

We build our houses on the sand,

Comely withoutside and within;

But when the winds and rains begin  
To beat on them, they cannot stand;  
They perish, quickly overthrown,  
Loose from the very basement stone. (19-24)

This stanza references a parable in Matthew Chapter 7, particularly the house of a “wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matt. 7.24), and that of “a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (Matt. 7.26). The verses deal with those who listen to God’s words and those who do not, and Rossetti’s appropriation of them dovetails with the theme of biblical paraphrasing and Ecclesiastes’s prescriptive guidance. The choice of house-building for commentary on labor is notable for the combination of men’s labor (building) and the domestic or feminine implication of the physical home. Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* has pointed out that domestic fiction written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to enclose conflict within the gendered domestic sphere in order to suggest the power of virtue in larger conflicts, such as that in between “an agrarian gentry and urban industrialists, for one, or between labor and capital” (48). The “winds and rain” (21) stand in for both the physical forces that beat against the fruits of our best labor and the societal forces that conspire to bring down our carefully managed homes. Domestic virtue is like the strength of a house against the elements; it, too, shall perish in the end.

The following two stanzas near the end of the poem gives readers a hint of salvation and perhaps reveals the inherent productivity of

melancholy:

He who hath little shall not lack;

He who hath plenty shall decay:

Our fathers went; we pass away;

Our children follow on our track:

So generations fail, and so

They are renewed and come and go.

The earth is fattened with our dead;

She swallows more and doth not cease:

Therefore her wine and oil increase

And her sheaves are not numberèd;

Therefore her plants are green, and all

Her pleasant trees lusty and tall. (55-66)

Lines 55–56 are paraphrases of Proverbs (28.27): “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.” Such utilization continues the combination of prescriptive theme and paraphrasing form. While “generations fail” (59) they are at the same time “renewed” (60). This can be interpreted as a comment on the futility of the generations, but also at the same time can be construed as the opposite, that with every generation that passes will come a new one. And while we die, “The earth is fattened with our dead” (61) to create more “wine and oil” (63) and numerous “sheaves” (64), green plants, and “pleasant trees” that are “lusty and tall” (66). As meaningless as our lives are, we and by

extension our labors are put into the creation of something beautiful.

This is an attitude encouraged even within Ecclesiastes itself: “Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God” (5.19). Keble in a sermon on Ecclesiastes Chapters Seven and Eight also brings forth a message of hope contained within the melancholy of the book: “For, ‘whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do,’ if we ‘do all to the glory of God,’ we shall do it with His blessing and approbation: it will be so much more of happiness, joy, and thanksgiving to us” (“Festival Joy”). This reading of Ecclesiastes as a message “to enjoy, with innocence, moderation, and thankfulness, the daily comforts and reliefs” (“Festival Joy”) was probably known to her. Accordingly, she may have interpreted Ecclesiastes’s words “rejoice in his labour” as a call to write, to create work that would enrich the world even after she has left it, and to rejoice in the fruits of that work. Thus, while the author of Ecclesiastes is careful to end with a reiteration of the fundamental futility of earthly human pursuits, he leaves in the middle of the text enough space for satisfaction in life, and perhaps even joy. By using a similar strategy in embedding the “wine and oil” (63), innumerable “sheaves” (64), and “pleasant trees” (65) in the third-to-last stanza of “A Testimony,” Rossetti may be alluding to this hidden message of Ecclesiastes, that at the end of all this productive melancholy is a hope for salvation and meaning.

## Chapter Three: The Poetics of Tractarian

### Reserve

#### Christina Rossetti and the Poetics of Reserve

If, as I have sought to demonstrate, Maude's navigation between her literary ambitions and external social pressures were aided by the poetics of melancholy, Maude's reconciliation between her creative impulse and religious ideals is made possible through Keble's Tractarian poetics. As such, it is necessary to examine the more specific mechanics of these poetics to discern Maude's (and Rossetti's) use of them in the development of a voice that complements or subsumes the poetics of melancholy for creatively productive ends. Critics assert that Rossetti was aware of Keble's ideas on the expressive mechanism of poetry, and that it had significant influence upon her work (Arseneau 71; Francis 118; Marsh 56; Tennyson 198). Arseneau, in particular, focuses on *Maude* to illustrate how Rossetti internalized Keble's Tractarian poetics—which Arseneau designates as the “poetics of reserve”—to develop her authorial voice of “reticence, secrecy, mystery, renunciation, modesty, and detachment” (67). Arseneau also argues that Maude, by utilizing such poetics of reserve, is able to reconcile the conflicting demands of her art and religion by imbuing spiritual meaning to her poetic impulse (94). In other words, Arseneau understands Maude's melancholy as a form of affectation and a manifestation of religious guilt that is overcome through the adoption of a poetics of reserve, or through the utilization of a religiously approved

creative strategy that validates the devout poet's professional identity. This religiously restorative reading highlights the previously neglected and indisputably crucial role of Tractarian poetics in Rossetti's productivity as a literary artist. One of the continuing arguments concerning Rossetti's Tractarian poetics of reserve from Tennyson to Arseneau to Francis has been the importance of understanding Rossetti's religious motives and background in analyzing her poetic vision.

However, focusing on the religious aspect of Tractarian poetics runs the danger of reducing Rossetti's beliefs to the status of an obstacle that had to be overcome before the poet could validate her calling. Such a reduction would belittle the innovative psychologizing behind the Tractarian poetics of reserve and its productive implications for scholars and artists alike. Therefore, the creative mechanics of Rossetti's Tractarian poetics need to be considered in tandem with her religious code, in order to appreciate the productivity of the poetics of reserve beyond its socially validating utility.

## **The Mechanics of Tractarian Reserve**

The poetics of reserve, rooted in Keble's ideas of poetry, largely involves the control or harnessing of emotions towards an eventual, desired release. Blair summarizes the mechanics of Tractarian poetics as follows:

The favourite metaphor for the function of forms in High Church writing is a channel . . . in relation to the management of emotion,

“channels” also suggests that rather than simply blocking the current of thoughts and feelings, forms allow them to be contained in a manageable and orderly way. Religious feeling is still intense, but this channelling suggests calm waters rather than turbulence, a steady, even flow rather than bursts or gushes of feeling. (32)

Blair suggests that such forms are necessarily “premised on *rhythmic*—even metrical—structures” (35), emphasizing the importance of repetitive, patterned form in the work of the Tractarian poets.

Continuing Arseneau’s inquiry into the more specific mechanics of the poetics of reserve, Francis has noted the similarities of Keble’s poetics with Romanticism, specifically of Wordsworthian spontaneous overflow. However, she perceives a key difference in the way Keble, while acknowledging that emotions are “natural,” also asserts that the instinct to repress these emotions is also natural (119). Keble states that poetry enables a solution whereby these conflicting urges to express and repress can be effectively controlled and calibrated to bring relief:

Poetry is the indirect expression in words, most appropriately in metrical words, of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence of which is somehow repressed . . . the conventional rules of metre and rhythm may evidently have the effect of determining in some one direction, the overflow of sentiment and expression, wherewith the mind might otherwise be oppressed . . . the rules may be no less useful, in throwing a kind

of veil over those strong and deep emotions, which need relief,  
but cannot endure publicity. (qtd. in Francis 119)

Poetry, by giving a way to control and express “the overflow of sentiment and expression,” has a therapeutic effect on the poet. The *Lyra Apostolica*, a collection of verse by some of the most prominent Tractarian poets and a key stylistic text of the movement, also attest to such a therapeutic effect, as evidenced by the many titles bearing the names of emotions—one sequence by Newman titled “Shame,” “Bondage,” “Terror,” and “Restlessness”—and the poems themselves using controlled form and religious imagery to both enervate yet express, in a calibrated manner, the emotion. In the sequence “Vanity of Vanities,” the first sonnet “Sovereignty of Spirit” seems to describe this process of the emotions being expressed in a controlled manner towards ultimate relief:

They do but grope in learning’s pedant round,  
Who on the fantasies of sense bestow  
An idol substance, bidding us bow low  
Before those shades of being which are found  
Stirring or still on man’s brief trial ground;  
As if such shapes and moods, which come and go,  
Had aught of Truth or Life in their poor show,  
To sway or judge, and skill to sain or wound.  
Son of immortal seed, high destined Man!  
Know thy dread gift,—a creature, yet a cause;  
Each mind is its own centre, and it draws

Home to itself, and moulds in its thought's span

All outward things, the vassals of its will,

Aided by Heaven, by earth unthwarted still. (Newman 48)

The epigraph of this sonnet—"Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain"—is from the Book of Common Prayer, in a section regarding funereal rites. The "vain shadow" is what the "fantasies of sense" (2) or the "shapes and moods, which come and go" (6) refer to, in other words the futile activities we engage in during our mortal lifetimes; the words "sense" and "moods" in particular recall the emotions, ones that make "Man . . . disquieteth himself in vain." Along with these emotions that keep us in thrall or "bidding us bow low" (3) are "learning's pedant round" (1), the speaker decrying the vain intellectualism also described in Ecclesiastes: "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit" (Ecc. 17). The title of the sequence itself, "Vanity of Vanities," is clearly a reference to Ecclesiastes, as with Maude's poem "Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith." "Sovereignty of Spirit" therefore has the same skepticism of the "madness" and "vexation of spirit" in Ecclesiastes. The speaker bids the reader, in the sestet, to "Know thy dread gift" (10) of being able to mold the things they can perceive to their will, and that will must be "Aided by Heaven" (14)—through religious, probably ritualistic methods—in order to be "unthwarted" (14) by anything on Earth. The spirit is sovereign, therefore able to control itself, with the aid of God.

This control is formally reflected in the Petrarchan sonnet form of the poem, which is the Tractarians' preferred mode of the sonnet. The other poems of *Lyra Apostolica* are also mostly Petrarchan sonnets or in common meter, forms that allow for both the expression and repression of affect. Such control and regulation should not be seen as outright repression, but as a method of inverse, therapeutic expression. This therapeutic effect and idea of expression through repression recalls Isobel Armstrong's expressive theory of Victorian women poets; indeed, Armstrong singles out Tractarian aesthetics in her own analysis of nineteenth-century women's poetry:

The problem is accentuated for Tractarian aesthetics by the theological necessity of a due "reserve," a refusal to bring forth an excess of feeling and an assent to hidden meaning. Keble's theory of the symbol speaks of the *concealing* as well as the *revealing* nature of symbol . . . since the representational symbol is both the *means* of expression and the *form* of its repression, expression and repression, although in conflict with one another, becomes interdependent. (341)

To both Keble and Armstrong, "repression" is not a negation of "expression" but a way of exerting artistic agency over one's emotions in a healthy and productive manner.

But what does it mean, in practice, to "control" or "reserve" one's emotions in writing poetry, and how is therapeutic repression and harmful repression to be distinguished? Under the poetics of reserve, what is the

specific mechanism of repression that an artist may adopt to serve ultimately expressive and sustainably productive ends? The key to discerning the “expressiveness” of literary control may be in determining the speaker’s poetic vector, namely the “movement outwards” as observed in the poems examined in the previous chapter of this thesis. Armstrong states, “The movement outwards, the breaking of barriers, is the essence of poetry and the essence of *healthy* poetry” (340); it is noteworthy that Keble also uses metaphors of physical sensation and health when describing the effect of poetry, that it “gives healing relief to secret mental emotion” (qtd. in Francis 119). In the previous chapter, it has been noted that such “movement outwards” from the ego implies the soul’s reaching for heaven, and, therefore, the spiritual health of the speaker.

This connection between isolation and melancholy is true to an extent in *Maude*. While Maude is depicted as being surrounded by family and friends, she is seen to deliberately withdraw, usually to write or to think (for example, she confines herself to her room after putting up Christmas decorations in Chapter Three of Part Two, and is discovered by Agnes to be writing). Moreover, she is at odds with the expectations of her community. As discussed in the first chapter, Maude is not as integrated with her society’s mores as Mary or Agnes. Indeed, the narrator also makes this very distinction clear in a direct comparison between Maude and Mary:

The two made a strong contrast: one was occupied by a thousand shifting thoughts of herself, her friends, her plans, what she must

do, and what she would do; the other, whatever might employ her tongue, and to a certain extent her mind, had always an under-current of thought intent upon herself. (267–68).

Mary's preoccupation with her friends, plans, activities, and expectations gives readers the impression that she is an active and willing participant in her surroundings. Maude, however, is more concerned with what she will or should say in particular situations, and has "always an under-current of thought upon herself;" she has, in other words, a psychological tendency to stay within the bounds of her inner creative world. Elsewhere in the novella, Mary is further described as socially vivacious and healthy, while Maude, over the course of the narrative, is frequently understood by other characters to be unwell, and consequently socially reclusive. Maude also becomes more melancholic after her accident when her physical condition confines her to her sofa, cutting her off from productive society, as symbolized by her inability to attend Mary's wedding (the wedding itself, in contrast to Maude's couch, being a synecdoche of Mary's full integration into society).

The only way for Maude to escape the essential melancholy of her bedridden state, and rise above wallowing in what confines her to traversing her barriers, is through "movement outwards" in her poetry. The narrator deliberately discloses the sequence of the last three poems written in Maude's life. These are: "Sleep, Let Me Sleep, for I Am Sick of Care," "Fade, Tender Lily," and "What Is It Jesus Saith unto the Soul." Taken in this order, the poems form a triptych that can be read

thematically as poems of resurrection and rebirth. Readers can follow Maude poetically engaging in a “movement outwards” from the confines of melancholy to the promise of salvation that lies beyond the cares of the self:

Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care;  
Sleep, let me sleep, for my pain wearies me.  
Shut out the light; thicken the heavy air  
With drowsy incense; let a distant stream  
Of music lull me, languid as a dream,  
Soft as the whisper of a Summer sea. (1–6, 296–97)

This poem is “dated ten days after Maude’s accident” (296), a period in which she would have been the most depressed; the dragging feeling from the spondees “me sleep” (1,2), “my pain” (2), and “Shut out” (3) is a hint of this laggardness. This dragging gives way to the lighter iambic meter as the speaker moves on to images of streaming incense, music, dreams, and the whispers of the sea. “Sleep” (1) can be read as death (or ultimate rest), or the sleep before final judgment.

Brad Sullivan asserts that the images in this poem are of “weariness, hopelessness, and unfulfilled longing,” that no redemption is promised in its theme of the cyclical nature of growth and death (227). However, Dolores Rosenblum focuses on the poem’s “degree of technical control,” which diametrically contrasts with the theme of “a woman’s will-less participation in the natural cycle of fruition and decay” (18). While this sense of control can clearly be read through the formal aspects

of the poem, the content also offers interpretations of alternate voices. The images of “air” (3), “music” (5), and possibly “incense” (4) in this poem are particularly notable in this respect; as Isobel Armstrong notes, air, music, and vibration can often be comprehended as encoded, expressive signals, of “the *secret*, the hidden experience” that “gives language a secondary status and is often written of as if it cannot take linguistic form at all” (339). Incense, music, and the vibration of the “whisper” (6) of the ocean, are all expressions, or the motion of ideas (or spirit) from the self to the outside. The alliteration of “s” sounds—“drowsy incense” (4), “distant stream” (4), “whisper of a Summer sea” (6)—also expels air and whispers, creating an aural connection with the content and the idea of doubleness of voice and non-verbal means of expression in Armstrong’s commentary on Victorian expressive theory. This “movement outwards” is further illustrated in another stanza of the same poem:

Listen, the music swells into a song,  
 A simple song I loved in days of yore;  
     The echoes take it up and up along  
 The hills, and the wind blows it back again.—  
 Peace, peace, there is a memory in that strain  
 Of happy days that shall return no more. (13–18, 297)

The expressed music, which contains a “memory” (6) of happiness, is constantly in motion in this stanza as it “swells” (1), “echoes” (3), and is blown back again (4). The word “echoes” (3) conjures the myth of Echo, whose identity as a silenced female contributes to the subtext of double

voices in Armstrong's idea of Victorian expressive theory, in how she cannot communicate in her own words but only through vicarious means. The song is taken "up and up" (3) in a heavenward, transcendent motion. This music—and perhaps the poem itself by extension—has a freedom that goes beyond the speaker's circumstances. Its freedom is expressed through its sheer motion, or moving heavenwards, away from the speaker herself.

The next poem in the sequence also features elements in motion. This work is more evolved in its poetics of reserve:

Fade, tender lily,  
    Fade, O crimson rose,  
Fade every flower,  
    Sweetest flower that blows.

Go, chilly Autumn,  
    Come O Winter cold;  
Let the green stalks die away  
    Into common mould.

Birth follows hard on death,  
    Life on withering.  
Hasten, we shall come the sooner  
    Back to pleasant Spring.— (297–98)

The poem has fewer words than the previous one in the sequence, and

uses unadorned and simple images of flowers and weather. These particular images also make it more conventionally feminine, recalling the doubleness of Armstrong's reading of Victorian expressive theory, of how the more "conventional" the poem, the more likely "conventions are subjected to investigation, questioned, or used for unexpected purposes" (324). Behind each image of hope and renewal, of a spring (salvation, resurrection) that returns after the cold, are the dying flowers and the murderous chill of the present (suffering on Earth). Scheinberg, in presenting the opportunities for re-contextualizing scripture through the Victorian tradition of paraphrasing, uses Rossetti's "Consider the Lilies of the Field" as an example of flowers being used as imagery representing women (2–3). While flowers, being part of the reproductive organs of plants, can have such sexual or gender connotations, another reading would be to connect them with the first occurrence of lilies and roses in the novella, which would be the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys that Agnes and Mary were embroidering for the lectern cover of their church. As these flowers represent a life of virtue, the speaker's narration about their fading and dying may at first seem a commentary on the unjustness of both good and evil having to end and becoming "common mould" (8). However, it seems that she is saying that this suffering is necessary in order to be reborn into "pleasant Spring" (12). Even the Lily of the Valley must die before being reborn, like Christ, and all Christians at the end times. While this is ultimately a message of hope, the underlying message is that of current suffering, of sacrifice and

injustice.

The form of this poem recalls the simplicity of a nursery rhyme. Sharon Smulders notes that a hallmark of Rossetti's verses for children is how she was "deliberately pitching her singsongs at two different audiences," and that readers during that era were aware that her nursery rhymes were also targeted at adults ("Sound, Sense, and Structure" 10–1). This is how nursery rhymes can connect with Victorian expressive theory, in how they present a surface voice of child-like innocence and an underlying voice of adult melancholy. The formal device of children's rhymes restrains and modulates the melancholy within a familiar and reassuring context. From this point of control, the speaker contains the melancholy and works against it to create movement. Note the motion of the flower that "blows" (4) and the hastening (11) motion of the speaker from autumn and winter towards spring. "Spring" (12) is a metaphor for resurrection and spiritual rebirth, and the destination of not only Maude's renunciation, but the artistic ideal that her poetics of reserve aspires to. The tone of the entire poem is also prescriptive, using imperatives to command the flowers, weather, and spirit to change and set in motion. This imperative tone also adds to a sense of expressive agency on the part of the speaker.

The final poem in the sequence is a summation of the poetics of reserve, both in terms of its meaning and mechanics:

What is it Jesus saith unto the soul?—

'Take up the Cross, and come, and follow Me.'

This word He saith to all; no man may be  
Without the Cross, wishing to win the goal.  
Then take it bravely up, setting thy whole  
Body to bear; it will not weigh on thee  
Beyond thy utmost strength: take it; for He  
Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control  
The powers of darkness that thou need'st not fear.  
He will be with thee, helping, strengthening,  
Until it is enough: for lo, the day  
Cometh when He shall call thee: thou shalt hear  
His Voice That says: 'Winter is past, and Spring  
Is come; arise, My Love, and come away.'— (298)

The poem is a return to the sonnet form; as discussed in the Introduction, Rossetti used the sonnet as a way of reconciling the sacred and the profane (Taft 318), and this poem can be read as a final balancing between the poetics of melancholy and the poetics of reserve. The fact that it is not only a devotional poem but also a poem of religious love—“arise, My Love, and come away” (14)—is also indicative of this harmonization of affective energy and spiritual aspiration. In this particular poem, the speaker herself is in motion, presumably from this world and into the next (heaven); if “no man may be / Without the Cross” (3–4), the cross may symbolize death as well as sacrifice or the burdens of life. In either case, both death and sacrifice are movements outward (the soul moving out of the body), as sacrifice necessitates the self to acknowledge the presence

and needs of others before the desires of one's own ego. By following Jesus's words and taking up the cross, the speaker declares mastery over melancholy. As long as she follows his dictates, he "will control / The powers of darkness" (8–9), so she can rely on her religious convictions to sustain her even though she is "weak" (8). The volta begins in line seven of the octave instead of the first line of the sestet, with "for He / Knoweth when thou art weak, and will control" (7–8), as if salvation has moved or spread up from the sestet into the octave. This balancing of the traditional octave and sestet of eight and six lines to an even seven and seven, the first seven lines of melancholic resignation and the last seven of spiritual salvation, is also indicative of the reconciled poetics of melancholy and reserve. The implication of "control" (8) and the overcoming of difficulty through faith is an implicit reflection of her agency. It is the vector of this agency—that it enables movement—which makes her devotion empowering. With the final words, "arise, My Love, and come away" (14), the speaker has literally moved on from this world—along with the author, Maude—and is now beyond melancholy, or in other words the pressures and divisions that divide the immortal, infinite self.

# Conclusion: Revelation: Rossetti's Creative

## Poetics of *Ekstasis*

It can be said that, on any occasion a writer writes about writing or writers, they are implicitly representing a creative theory. *Maude*, arguably more than any of Rossetti's other works, may be read as the author's creative manifesto, and not only because it happens to be about writing and writers. It is also because it is one of her earliest works, written when Rossetti, like any other young and aspiring author, was thinking through the issues of her place in society and her ambitions as a literary artist. This thesis is an attempt to discern these concerns and the writer's resultant manifesto through a close examination of the main character's motivations and conflicts as they appear in her work. Rossetti, as a successful literary artist during an era where her social context seemed to conspire against her creativity, presents, along with other productive women writers of this period, a diversity of literary tools, methods, and heuristics that contemporary writers (female or otherwise) can possibly employ in their own artistic pursuits. Through *Maude*, Rossetti illustrates the productive interaction between melancholy and the poetics of Tractarian reserve in overcoming the social pressures that confine and fragment the creative and artistic self.

This thesis has sought to reveal the creative poetics of the poems in Rossetti's *Maude* by analyzing the dialectic between the main protagonist's artistic melancholy and her Tractarian poetics. *Maude's*

melancholy was read through Riede's theory of nineteenth-century poetic melancholy, where the literary melancholy is understood as a result of the clash between the Romantic "infinite" interior self and external nineteenth-century constraints that bourgeois culture imposed on individuals. In this interpretation, Maude may be understood as initially afflicted with melancholy because she is unable to reconcile her artistic ambition or the poetic potential of her "infinite self" with the social pressure to become an Angel in the House or a nun, two of the few sanctioned possibilities available to middle-class Victorian women. Her poetry expresses her melancholy as a transgression against such norms, helping her to define herself as an artist in the pattern of the male Romantic poets. However, such an identity is problematized by her religion's precepts against self-regard, or "vanity." I have argued that, by the end of the story, Maude is able to reconcile her Romantic "infinite self" with her religion through her application of Tractarian poetics. Specifically, Maude is able to find liberation through the "movement outwards," as defined by Isobel Armstrong, from the forces that confine the self, not through the repression of emotions, but their modulated expression. The development and eventual execution of this entire process can be observed in the evolution of Maude's poetry, a process that can be further understood through the contextualization of the poems within Rossetti's narrative.

Certain critics tend to regard Rossetti's religion as having subsumed her art, and that the aim of her poetry was ultimately to

abandon melancholic emotions to arrive at an egoless productive space through religion (Arseneau 86; Winters 300; Gilbert and Gubar, 554; Smulders “A Form that Differentiates” 163). Instead, I have argued that, in *Maude*, a different practice may be found, for melancholy is still very much in effect at the end of the text, and it is in dialectic between melancholy and ritualistic control that the power of her poetry is felt. Dombrowski observes that “the firm technical control and simple diction which characterize her poetry seem to arise not from equanimity and detachment but from attempts to resolve or control an underlying tension” (70). I have identified this “underlying tension” as Rossetti’s melancholy, and the “control” in her language as the poetics of reserve. Within Rossetti’s creative poetics, neither melancholy nor reserve is superior or subservient to the other.

*Maude*, thus, illustrates the development of the mechanism of Rossetti’s creative poetics. However, as juvenilia, it is not necessarily the poet’s best work. A more mature example of Rossetti’s artistry, and a better example of the full fruition of her Tractarian poetics of reserve, both in terms of form and content, would be “Winter: My Secret”:

I tell my secret? No indeed, not I:  
Perhaps some day, who knows?  
But not to-day; it froze, and blows, and snows,  
And you’re too curious: fie!  
You want to hear it? well:  
Only, my secret’s mine, and I won’t tell.

Or, after all, perhaps there's none:  
Suppose there is no secret after all,  
But only just my fun.  
To-day's a nipping day, a biting day;  
In which one wants a shawl,  
A veil, a cloak, and other wraps:  
I cannot ope to every one who taps,  
And let the draughts come whistling through my hall;  
Come bounding and surrounding me,  
Come buffeting, astounding me,  
Nipping and clipping through my wraps and all.  
I wear my mask for warmth: who ever shows  
His nose to Russian snows  
To be pecked at by every wind that blows?  
You would not peck? I thank you for good will,  
Believe, but leave that truth untested still.

Spring's an expansive time: yet I don't trust  
March with its peck of dust,  
Nor April with its rainbow-crowned brief showers,  
Nor even May, whose flowers  
One frost may wither through the sunless hours.  
Perhaps some languid summer day,

When drowsy birds sing less and less,  
And golden fruit is ripening to excess,  
If there's not too much sun nor too much cloud,  
And the warm wind is neither still nor loud,  
Perhaps my secret I may say,  
Or you may guess. (41)

The theme of the poem is, as the title suggests, a “secret” that the speaker does not reveal. The playful tone of the poem—“Suppose there is no secret after all, / But only just my fun” (8–9)—does not seem overtly melancholic, but the speaker’s distress under the effects of winter can stand in for the speaker’s melancholy, her consternation with weather that “froze, and blows, and snows” (3) with winds that “Come bounding and surrounding me, / Come buffeting, astounding me, / Nipping and clipping through my wraps and all” (15–17). Winter itself conjures a melancholic landscape, contrasting with the “expansive time” (23) of spring or the “warm wind” (32) blowing on a summer’s day. Yet, underneath the bleakness of winter and the “shawl, / A veil, a cloak, and other wraps” (11–12) the speaker employs against the cold, there lies, we are continuously made aware, a secret. The speaker’s shawls, veils, cloaks, and other wraps simultaneously conceal, and signal the presence of, this secret; the wraps are like deceptively simple poems, a blank surface with only the hint of what lies beneath. The secret itself is never revealed, although the reader is encouraged to try. Each stanza ends with an iambic pentameter line, except the last; there seems to be a final trimeter missing

at the end of the poem, as if inviting the reader to fill it in or imagine what it may be. The content of the final two lines also poses a challenge to the reader to guess, or it may be, instead, an unspoken warning, that “you may guess” (34), but you will never know. D’Amico cautions against guessing on “a single secret—romantic, sexual, spiritual, or political,” and that “it is far more useful to think in terms of secrets, that is, in terms of the complexity of the woman who wrote the poems” (176). I have argued that this “complexity” is the Romantic infinite self, which contains the “romantic, sexual, spiritual, or political,” or the collective potential of all the different “secrets” that can be read from the language. And it is the development and signaling of this mature complexity that makes *Maude*, despite it being juvenilia, an important work in understanding Rossetti’s artistry.

Sensitivity to such complexity is also necessary in order to understand the ambiguous ending of *Maude*. Some readers may perceive *Maude*’s death as the young Rossetti’s failure to imagine a heroine who can live in the mid-nineteenth-century world as both a devout woman and a respectable poet. Such a reading misses the point, as Rossetti went on to personally embody this ideal in her own career that followed *Maude*, through utilizing the poetics of reserve that enabled her to realize her devotional ideals and calibrate her melancholy to productive effect, creating a body of work that still resonates with readers in the present day. Redemption is also present within the narrative itself, namely through the dynamic of the “movement outwards” in the final poems, and this

dynamic, again, should be read through Maude's religious context. Karen Armstrong, a religious scholar and former nun, postulates the reason for religiously motivated movement from the ego as follows:

The Greek *ekstasis*, it will be recalled, simply means "standing outside." And "transcendence" means "climbing above and beyond" . . . What I now realize, from my study of the different religious traditions, is that a disciplined attempt to go beyond the ego brings about a state of ecstasy. Indeed it *is* in itself *ekstasis*. Theologians in all the great faiths have devised all kinds of myths to show that this type of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, is found in the life of God itself . . . We are most creative and sense other possibilities that transcend our ordinary experience when we leave ourselves behind. (278–79)

This process of *ekstasis* resembles the "movement outwards" of Isobel Armstrong's expressive theory of Victorian poetry. The Tractarian poetic mechanism of modulating the emotions as discussed throughout this thesis is ultimately an attempt to leave the self and "transcend our ordinary experience," or in this case, the confining pressures upon our infinite selves that creates melancholy in our lives. It seems that Maude was trying to achieve such *ekstasis*. In this case, Maude's death is symbolic of her soul standing outside of itself, having achieved if not in her art, then in Rossetti's, this *ekstasis*, or movement outwards into freedom.

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## 국문 초록

본 논문은 옥스퍼드 운동론의 절제 시학과 의식주의가 우울함을 전복시키는 과정이 크리스티나 로제티의 『모드』(1850)에 어떻게 드러났는가를 탐구한다. 또 옥스퍼드 운동론의 시학에 관한 기존 연구를 기반으로, 소설의 주인공 모드는 사회가 유도한 우울함에 종교와 의식주의로 대항한다고 해석한다. 서론은 19세기 영국 시에서 나타나는 우울함에 관한 데이비드 리드의 이론을 활용, 우울함을 “무한한” 내부성이 사회적 압력에 의해 쪼개진 “분열된 자아”의 표현이라고 정의한다. 이어 1장은 이 우울함이 모드에게 어떤 형태로 나타나는지, 이때 젠더와 계층 그리고 종교적 관습에 따른 양상은 무엇인지를 분석한다. 또 모드가 “집안의 천사” 혹은 수녀가 되라는 압박에서 벗어나고, 시인으로서의 정체성을 보호하기 위해 우울함을 겉으로 표현했다고 봤다. 2장은 모드의 시학에서 구약성경 전도서의 의미를 다룬다. 그리고 전도서에 내재한 우울함과 종교적 심의를 시에서 활용해 예술과 종교를 아우르는 창조적 미학을 끌어낸 모드를 보여준다. 전도서는 우울함을 내포한 동시에 예술적 생산성을 정당화하는 텍스트다. 나아가 3장은 옥스퍼드 운동론의 종교문학관이 로제티 문학의 우울함이나 예술성에 미친 영향을 더 구체적으로 살펴본다. 로제티 관련 사료와 존 키블 등 옥스퍼드 운동의 시인들에 대한 기존 연구를 두고 바탕으로 볼 때, 소설 『모드』는 우울한 시의 허영과 종교적 품위의 갈등을 조정하려 시도한 작품으로 읽을 수 있다. “집안의 천사”와 수녀의 길을 거부한 모드의 행위는 시 혹은 종교적 신념 하나만 선택하지 않고 본인의 예술혼을 종교적 신념과 조화시키려는 의도를 띠었다고 해석할 수 있기 때문이다. 결국 모드는

이소벨 암스트롱의 빅토리안 표현 시학에서 말하는 “외부로의 움직임”을 지향하는 방법으로 옥스퍼드 운동론의 절제 시학을 채택했다고 할 수 있다. 그는 종교와 우울함 모두를 예술에 활용해 우울함에 대항했다. 이 “외부로의 움직임”은 주인공 모드의 시로 나타난다. 해당 작품의 정밀 독서(close reading)는 작가 로제티 본인의 문학적 우울함과 옥스퍼드 운동론 시학 사이의 생산적인 변증법적 시학을 보여준다.

**주요어:** 크리스티나 로제티, 모드, 옥스퍼드 운동, 우울, 집안의 천사, 전도서

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