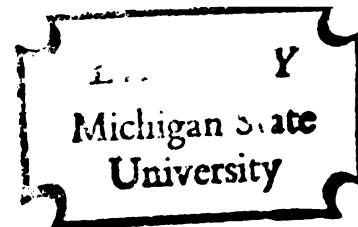


THE MAGDALEN: AN EXPLORATION OF
THE SHAPING OF MYTHS AROUND
THE MARY MAGDALENE OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT CANONICAL GOSPELS AND
AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF
THE MYTHS ON THE LITERARY FIGURE,
PARTICULARLY ON THE HEROINE OF
THE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY DIGBY PLAY
MARY MAGDALENE

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
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MARJORIE M. MALVERN
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The Magdalen: an Exploration of the Shaping of Myths
Around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament Canonical
Gospels and an Examination of the Effects of the Myths
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Marjorie M. Malvern

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Major professor

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ABSTRACT

THE MAGDALEN: AN EXPLORATION OF THE SHAPING OF MYTHS AROUND
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AND AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE MYTHS ON THE
LITERARY FIGURE, PARTICULARLY ON THE HEROINE OF THE
FIFTEENTH-CENTURY DIGBY PLAY MARY MAGDALENE

By

Marjorie M. Malvern

The major purpose of this study of the Magdalen is to deepen understanding of a figure who has appealed to mankind's imagination for some two thousand years. To try to fulfill its major purpose, the study explores the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene sketched in the New Testament canonical gospels and examines the effects of the myths on the literary figure, particularly on the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby play Mary Magdalene.

The Introduction emphasizes the Magdalen's popular appeal as it is exemplified in varied monuments to her memory. Chapter I traces the heroine of the Digby Mary Magdalene through the scenes of the play and raises questions concerning both the reasons for the Magdalen's reaching the stature of a heroine in the medieval play and the possible sources for the complex literary figure.

Chapter II views the Magdalen pictured in the New Testament canonical gospels and finds her role in the Gospel of John archetypal, suggestive of the antique earth-goddess, whatever her name, lamenting the death of the heaven-god and rejoicing in finding him resurrected. That the archetypal character of the Magdalen's role in the Gospel of John is, in large part, responsible for the identification of the Magdalen with other figures in the New Testament is set up as a hypothesis for examining the other canonical gospel figures with whom the Magdalen is early identified. It is observed that the identification of the Magdalen with other figures makes her at once a more complex figure and a figure closer to the Christ than is the woman specifically referred to in the New Testament as Mary Magdalene.

Chapter III examines the Magdalen's place in apocryphal writings, especially in the Gospel of Mary and the Pistis Sophia, and gives further evidence of attempts both to isolate the Magdalen as the feminine figure closest to the Christ and to incorporate into her person attributes of antique goddesses, who embody the paradoxical archetypal feminine. She is seen as both a goddess of wisdom and of love.

Chapter IV treats the attributes given the Magdalen through writings of Hippolytus and Origen; the Magdalen becomes a "second Eve" as well as the Christ's "soror mea sponsa," the Bride of the Song of Songs. The archetypal

character of the Song of Songs and the importance of Origen's mystical interpretation of the Song in the creation of the prototype for the medieval figure of the mythical Magdalen are emphasized.

Chapter V exemplifies the fulfillment of the prototype of the Magdalen during the complex Middle Ages by pointing out the importance given Mary Magdalene in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church and in popular tradition from the time of the Crusades into the later Middle Ages.

Chapter VI illustrates the expansion of the Magdalen's role in plays and in iconography selected from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fifteenth centuries, in which attributes similar to those given the Magdalen during the early centuries of Christianity are again discernible.

The study's theme, reiterated in the Conclusion, is that the Magdalen became an important literary figure because she was chosen by homo ludens during the early Christian period as a vessel for ideas too tenacious and too profound to be destroyed. The Magdalen became, and remains in Western literature of the twentieth century, the study concludes, a vessel for the paradoxical ideas of the archetypal feminine.

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By

Marjorie M.^{Magdalene} Malvern

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PREFACE

From the search for answers to questions excited in my mind by Professor Arnold Williams' course in medieval drama came this study of the Magdalen. The study explores the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels and examines the effects of the myths on the literary figure, particularly on the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby Mary Magdalene. By viewing the Magdalen as she appears in early writings that give evidence of the nature of myths attached to the New Testament figure, I hope to deepen understanding of both the creation of the literary figure and the significance of the heroine of the Digby play.

During the five years of investigation distilled in this brief study of the Magdalen, I have, of course, become indebted to a number of people. I shall not here express my thanks to those who have indirectly helped me. I do, however, wish to express my gratitude to those who have most directly helped me complete the study which follows:

To Professor Arnold Williams not only for his stimulating course that excited the Magdalen questions in my

mind and for his wise counsel, whether or not he was on leave from Michigan State University, as chairman of my guidance committee, but also for his thoughtful reading of, and suggesting improvements for, the Magdalen study when he had more important things to think about.

To Professor John Yunck both for serving on my guidance committee and for, some years ago, quickening my interest in the Middle Ages through his course on Chaucer.

To Professor Joseph Summers for serving on my guidance committee, for not only suggesting that I read E. H. Gombrich's Art and Illusion but also for lending me his copy of the work, and for listening to my effusions about the Magdalen even before he became a member of my guidance committee.

To the staffs of libraries at the University of Michigan, the University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford University, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and Michigan State University, with particular thanks to the Inter-library Loan staff at Michigan State University.

To Marcia Maureen Sullivan for reading the manuscript and for expressing recognition of parallels between the Digby play Mary Magdalene and the Theatre of the Absurd.

And to Larry Malvern, Professor in the Engineering College at Michigan State University, for going beyond the

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INTRODUCTION

THE MYTHICAL MAGDALEN AND VARIED MONUMENTS TO HER MEMORY

The Magdalen, a mythical figure shaped around the Mary Magdalene who is briefly sketched in the New Testament canonical gospels, has figured in imaginations for some two thousand years. Her popular appeal through the centuries of the Christian era manifests itself in the numerous and varied monuments to her memory.

Not only do many churches bear the name of the Magdalen, but colleges, hospitals, benevolent societies for reformed prostitutes, city streets, and women of many countries have been named for her. In the Tyrol, as Louis Réau points out in his Iconographie de l'art chrétien (II, 849), children born out of wedlock were also given her name.¹ We recall that Chaucer's shipman's "barge ycleped was the Maudelayne." And Réau mentions that in the seventeenth century a small French cake, still popular today, took her name (II, 849). White roses are in Germany called "Magdalenrosen" (Réau, II, 847). A vineyard at Lyon was named for her before the end

¹Louis Réau, Iconographie de l'art chrétien (Paris, 1955-1957), Volls. I and II--hereafter referred to as Réau.

of the twelfth century, as Victor Saxer notes in Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident (p. 247).² A white peach also bears her name, as the Oxford English Dictionary states (1933 edition, VI, ii, 23) and illustrates with a quotation from a 1706 issue of the Retir'd Gardn'r:
 "The white Magdalen has a sugar'd winy taste...."

The Magdalen is, in fact, the patron saint of gardeners, and of "winegrowers," as well as of pharmacists, glove-makers, perfume manufacturers, hair-dressers, podiatrists, comb-makers, foundrymen, tawers, barrel-makers, and weavers.³ And she was in the Middle Ages, as Chaucer well knew, a "protector of sailors."⁴ She was especially honored by medieval religious orders of reformed prostitutes, and prisoners had access to her intercession (Réau, II, 849).

She is indirectly responsible for the invention in France of a local saint, Saint Rabony, who, good wives believed, had the faculty to improve ("rabbonir": as to improve wine) bad husbands. Saint Rabony, Réau reports (I, 325), originated from an inscription on a phylactery

²Victor Saxer, Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident, des origines à la fin du moyen âge (Paris, 1959)--hereafter referred to as Le Culte.

³The Magdalen's patronages are listed, for example, in Johannes H. Emminghaus, Mary Magdalene, Vol. 5 of The Saints in Legend and Art (Recklinghausen, W. Germany, 1964), text of story and legend by Leonhard Küppers, trans. from German by Hans Herman Rosenwald, p. 1.

⁴Emminghaus, Mary Magdalene, p. 12.

which emphasizes the Magdalen's recognition of the resurrected Christ, as told in the Gospel of John 20: 16, with the word "Rabboni" coming from her mouth.

The Magdalen also has the honor, a dubious honor to be sure, of contributing to the English language the word "maudlin." Her name becomes, by the seventeenth century, synonymous with an overly sentimental weeper, particularly a tearful drunk who is "maudlin-cupped," and who "maudlinly maudlinizes" and mouths "maudlinisms."⁵

The numerous and varied iconographic monuments to the Magdalen manifest her appeal to artists as different from each other as Giotto and Rouault or as Donatello and Marochetti. And literary monuments to the Magdalen extend from at least the second century of the Christian era into the twentieth century.

Myths that grew up around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels during the early centuries of Christianity cling to the Magdalen who figures not only in medieval literature but also in twentieth-century literature. Linking the Magdalen of the second-century Pistis Sophia with the Magdalen who appears in twentieth-century works, such as, for example, Niko~~o~~ Kazantzakis' novels The Last Temptation of Christ and The Greek Passion,

⁵See Oxford English Dictionary (VI, ii, 247) for examples from literature.

is the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby play Mary Magdalene.

Since the heroine of the Digby play embodies more of the myths shaped around the Mary Magdalene sketched in the New Testament than does any other literary figure, I focus this study on the Magdalen of the Digby play. And since the myths that were early attached to the New Testament figure have not, so far as I have been able to discover, been thoroughly treated, I closely examine apocryphal and homiletic writings of the early Christian period, writings which gave evidence of both the significance of the myths and the probable reasons for the myths having been attached specifically to the Magdalen.

The literary figure of the Magdalen has been the subject of several recent studies. Her role in medieval drama has been treated by Friedrich Otto Knoll in Die Rolle der Maria Magdalena in geistlichen Spiel des Mittelalters (Berlin and Leipzig, 1934) and by Sister Mary John of Carmel Chauvin in The Role of Mary Magdalene in Medieval Drama (Washington, D. C., 1951). Sister Chauvin sees the Magdalen of Western drama in three stages: as a "sinner," as a "disciple," as a "saint." She stresses the didactic and symbolic purposes of the Magdalen's roles and classifies the heroine of the Digby play as a type of Christian "Everywoman."

Knoll, in his brief study of sources for the Magdalen scenes in the drama, finds the worldly scenes based on the

life of the times and places in which the plays were written and performed, and he sees the sources for the Magdalen's role as a "sinner" in the New Testament figure and in parallels with other New Testament figures who were converted sinners, such as Paul and Peter.

Although not specifically devoted to the Magdalen, two other recent studies include discussions of her role in the drama. Eleanor Prosser, in her Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays (Stanford, Calif., 1961), emphasizes the Magdalen's role as a Christian penitent. Gustave Cohen, in his Études d'histoire du théâtre en France au moyen-âge et à la renaissance (Paris, 1956), reflects appreciation for the full, complex character of the Magdalen in French drama in an essay (Chapter VII) devoted to her, but the figure outside the French drama is, of course, not within the scope of Cohen's studies.

Helen Meredith Garth, in "Saint Mary Magdalene in Medieval Literature," published in Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science (Baltimore, Maryland, 1950), Vol. 67, pp. 347-452, emphasizes, as does Professor Prosser, the Magdalen's role as a penitent. Although the Magdalen's role as a Christian penitent is an important one, it results from one of the attributes given the figure by early Church Fathers after she had been given the attribute of a prostitute, and it is only one aspect of a complex literary figure.

W. Oster-Fenton points out the importance of the Magdalen in medieval lyrics in his study Maria Magdalena in der Lyrics des Mittelalters (Düsseldorf, 1966). And Gerhard John Reimer's unpublished Master's Thesis "Maria Magdalena in Werken von Hebbel, Heyse, Schlaf, und Thoma" (Michigan State University, 1965) exemplifies the continuing importance of the Magdalen in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German literature where the Magdalen figures as various types of the whore.

Since I have not seen any study which suggests to me satisfactory reasons for the Magdalen's becoming a long-lived mythical figure, I go back to the non-orthodox as well as orthodox writings of the early Christian period to try to see the Magdalen myth taking shape. Obviously I do not see, as does an anonymous author of an article published on the religious page of The State Journal (Lansing, Michigan) on August 28, 1965, the myth as "libel."

The article, headed Mary Magdalene Victim of Libel and superscribed in smaller type Her Gospel Role Important, begins: "July 22 each year is dedicated to the most libeled woman in Christian history. Her name is Mary Magdalene. Solely because of a mistake in identification, she has been spoken of for centuries as a fallen woman." The article explains the "libel" as a result of "juxtaposition" of Luke's mention of the Magdalen with his story of the prostitute who washed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair and of the transferring to the Magdalen of the "unsavory reputation

of her home town, a notoriously licentious fishing village," as well as of the interpretation of the seven demons, which Jesus had cast out of her, as "demons of unchastity" rather than a "serious mental illness."

The article suggests that Mary Magdalene's gospel role is important enough without "embellishing it with sentimental nonsense about her 'past'" and summarizes her gospel role. As one of the women who performed the "kind of humble but essential service which millions of Christian women still perform in the church," she is, the article states, "patron saint of all women of all ages who have helped finance the mission of the church through bazaars and bake sales." And she was the "first Christian to have the privilege of proclaiming to others the glad tidings which constitutes the heart of the gospel."

The same view, with identical explanation for the "libel," is expressed by Edith Deen in All the Women of the Bible (New York, 1955; pp. 200-205). It is not an uncommon view, but that the explanation is newsworthy indicates the continued popularity of the controversial mythical Magdalen.

However accurate this twentieth-century newspaper article's picture of the Magdalen as the good Christian woman who does the "humble but essential service" for the church may be, the figure here represented would certainly never have reached the stature of heroine in the fifteenth-century Digby play.

The Magdalen's gospel role is, as the article suggests, indeed important. And I suggest that its archetypal element of the woman lamenting the dead God and rejoicing in finding him resurrected may account in large part for the myths which grew up around the Magdalen and gave her significance and popular appeal beyond the gospel model.

I agree with Denis de Rougemont when he says in Love in the Western World: "No myth arises so long as it is possible to keep to the obvious and to express the obvious openly and directly. On the contrary, a myth arises whenever it becomes dangerous or impossible to speak plainly about certain social or religious matters, or affective relations, and yet there is a desire to preserve these or else it is impossible to destroy them."⁶

I do, however, see in myth's arising an element which de Rougemont apparently does not see. That is the play element. Johan Huizinga in Homo Ludens describes this characteristic of myth: "In myth, primitive man seeks to account for the world of phenomena by grounding it in the Divine. In all the wild imaginings of mythology a fanciful spirit is playing on the border-line between jest and earnest."⁷

⁶Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. by Montgomery Belgion (New York, revised and augmented edition, 1957), p. 8.

⁷Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens, a study of the play element in culture (First published in German, 1944; English edition, Boston, 1962), p. 5.

Homo ludens works on the borderline between jest and earnest in the eclectic shaping of the Magdalen myth around the figure found in the New Testament canonical gospels as he attempts to fulfill a desire to preserve both antique figures dangerous to Christianity and "affective relations" frowned upon by Judeo-Christianity.

The major purposes of this study are, then, to examine myths shaped around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels in the creation of the Magdalen and to observe the effects of the myths on the literary figure, particularly on the heroine of the Digby play Mary Magdalene.

After following the Magdalen through the scenes of the long Digby play, we go back to view the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels and the other New Testament figures with whom she is early identified. As we examine the Magdalen's place in early apocryphal and homiletic writings we discover the prototype for the literary figure of the Magdalen. We return to the Middle Ages to view the fulfillment of the prototype, particularly in the heroine of the Digby play.

Beneath the major purposes of the study lurks a desire to enrich appreciation for the significance of a literary figure whose very name is used by such writers as James Joyce, Günter Grass, John Barth, and Saul Bellow to connote differing attributes of that paradoxical complexity called the archetypal feminine.

yff Ony thyng Amyss be,
blame connyng, and nat me:
I desyer the redars to be my frynd,
yff ther be ony amysse, that to amend.

--Epilogue to the Digby

Mary Magdalene.

CHAPTER I

THE HEROINE OF THE DIGBY MARY MAGDALENE

While the Magdalen appears in the earliest extant recorded Christian drama of the Western world, she does not appear as a woman who has experienced a life of her own. In the earliest plays, the tenth-century Quem quaeritis plays, which dramatize only the scene central to Christianity, we see the Magdalen for just a moment as she, with the other Mary or Marys, goes to the sepulchre seeking Christ and, finding the tomb empty, is told by an angel that Christ has arisen. In the fifteenth-century Digby play, however, we see her whole long complex life dramatized; we see her as a many-sided figure living and dying in time.

Although time is telescoped in the Digby play, both the length and the complexity of the Magdalen's life are implicit in the varied scenes devoted to her. Scenes switching from her castle to a tavern show her first as a devoted daughter of Cyrus and a gracious sister of Martha and Lazarus, and then as a beautiful woman delighting in fine wines and in her "gallant" lover. A scene showing her in an arbor, amongst "balms precious of price" as she waits for one of

her many worldly "valentynes" to appear is set in sharp contrast with the scene in which she goes to anoint Christ with "precious balms" and to become Christ's devoted follower and "lover."

Derived from the Quem quaeritis plays is the scene in which the Magdalen, with the other Marys, goes to the tomb seeking Christ, but differing from the early plays is the scene in which the risen Christ appears in the garden to the Magdalen alone. And contrasting with the Magdalen's waiting for her "blossom of bliss" in an arbor is the Magdalen's search for the Christ in the garden. The Magdalen of the Digby play is, then, not only more complex than the Magdalen of the Quem quaeritis plays, but she is also shown in a much closer relationship with the Christ than is the Magdalen of the early plays.

Scenes moving from Jesus in heaven to the Magdalen on earth reveal the shared devotion of the Christ and his "beloved friend," whom he sends to Marseilles as "an holy apostylesse" and whom he protects through the last thirty years of her life as a hermit. And scenes showing the Magdalen's role in Marseilles reveal in the "holy apostylesse" attributes of an ancient goddess.

As we follow the Magdalen through the scenes of the Digby play, we fully realize that the fifteenth-century literary figure embodies traditions not used by the tenth-century playwrights. We see too that, as Arnold Williams

points out in The Drama of Medieval England, the play itself "contains nearly every element of technique available to the late fifteenth-century dramatist. Some scenes go back to the liturgical Easter play, some are developed on the pattern of the craft cycles, some parallel the moralities."⁸ We also become aware that the Digby playwright, with his eclectic imagination, is indeed homo ludens working on the borderline between jest and earnest.

The Digby playwright moves from slapstick to high solemnity. He mingles personified figures of the World, the Flesh, the Devil, and their cohorts, the seven deadly sins, with Biblical figures; he parodies the Roman Catholic mass and the worship of relics in a service dedicated to "Mahound." He has the king of Marseilles, in a tribute to the Magdalen, echo words used by the Magdalen in praise of Jesus; he shows the Magdalen as the feminine counterpart of the Christ.

In the Digby Mary Magdalene, we first see the Magdalen with her family in the castle of Maudlin.⁹ Cyrus is boasting of his great wealth as he deeds his property to his children. To his daughter Mary, "ful fayr and ful of femynyte" (l. 71), he gives the castle of Maudlin. To Lazarus he gives

⁸Arnold Williams, The Drama of Medieval England (East Lansing, Michigan, 1961), pp. 164-165.

⁹Mary Magdalene, published in the Digby Mysteries, edited by F. J. Furnivall for the New Shakespeare Society in 1882 and published for the Early English Text Society, Extra Series LXX, London, 1896, and reprinted in 1930, pp. 53-136.

Jerusalem, and to Martha, Bethany (11. 79-84). The children thank Cyrus, and the Magdalen says that to her comfort this place of "plesavns," fit for the daughter of a king, will preserve her from worldly labors (11. 97-100).

The scene switches to Herod, then to Pilate, before we see Cyrus blessing his children as he dies. Each of the children laments the death of Cyrus, but the Magdalen, in contrast with Martha and Lazarus, does not express her private grief. Instead, she asks God to be Cyrus's help and to bring the three of them out of their "dolor," for God is, she says, "most mytyest governour,/ from soroyng vs to restryne" (11. 289-290). The children fulfill their father's will, and Martha says that she and Mary will respect Lazarus as their "hed and governour" (1. 300), while the Magdalen welcomes her brother and sister to her castle (11. 303-304).

Juxtaposed with the picture of the Magdalen as a virtuous daughter, grateful to her father for his gifts that will preserve her from worldly labors, is the next scene showing the Magdalen as a prostitute delighting in her worldly companions. With the change in mood the play becomes a Morality. The temptations of the Magdalen, like those of Mankind in The Castle of Perseverance, a Morality contemporary with the Digby Mary Magdalene, are flesh-and-blood figures. The Castle of Maudlin is, like the Castle of Perseverance, besieged by the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Magdalen, like Mankind, is moved to repentance by warnings from a Good Angel.

The Digby playwright, as Sister Mary John of Carmel Chauvin suggests in The Role of Mary Magdalene in Medieval Drama (p. 195), dramatizes the Magdalen's fall and repentance through the techniques of the Morality.

We see the World, the Flesh and his wife Lechery, the Devil, and their cohorts Wealth, Envy, Sloth, Gluttony, and Sensuality, in council to plot the seduction of the Magdalen. World says, "yf she in vertu may dwelle," she will be able to destroy hell (11. 419-420). Flesh sends his lady Lechery to attend the Magdalen, "beral of bewte," and Satan sends spirits malign to enter into the Magdalen so that hell may win her (11. 423-435).

The Seven Deadly Sins besiege the castle of Maudlin and then agree to go to Jerusalem, while Lechery and the Bad Angel enter the castle to greet the Magdalen. Lechery, using the old trick of flattery, compares the Magdalen's "bemys of bewte" with the sun's rays and calls her most "debonarius" with her angelic delicacy (11. 440-444). The Magdalen, taken in by Lechery's praise, welcomes her whose "tong is so amabyll devyded with reson" and tells Lechery of her grief for her father's death (11. 451-455). Lechery tells her to be of good "comfort" and says, "prynt you in sportes whych best doth yow ples" (11. 456-459). Mary leaves her castle in the governance of Lazarus and Martha, commends her brother and sister to God, and departs with Lechery for Jerusalem.

The scene switches to a tavern. The Magdalen and Lechery are greeted by the taverner, "wytty and wyse," who

bears the prize, he says, of all taverners in Jerusalem. He extols his wines, obviously imported, and Lechery orders his finest wine (11. 470-481). The taverner serves them a "good restoratyff," and the Magdalen, delighted with the wine, tells the taverner, "grom of blysse," that indeed he speaks truth, and that to her he is courteous and kind (11. 486-490).

As the Magdalen and Lechery sip their wine, Curiosity, a "gallant," blusters into the tavern and boasts of his "lady constant," of his fashionable clothes, and of his favorite pastime (11. 491-506). Lechery tells the Magdalen that this man is for her, to "sett" her in "sporttes and talkyng," and the Magdalen, declaring that they will make full merry, promptly asks the taverner to call Curiosity in to them (11. 508-510).

Curiosity dashes in, tosses out a flowery love speech to the Magdalen, addressing her as his dear duchess and vowing his love to her for always (11. 515-519). The Magdalen, overwhelmed with Curiosity's sudden "love," asks him if he thinks her a "kelle" (1. 520). Curiosity assures her that he thinks her no "whore" and begs her to return his love, for he cannot refrain from loving her, so womanly is her person (11. 521-526).

The lovers dance, have sops in wine, and the Magdalen tells Curiosity that her love begins to "close" in him (11. 530-539). Curiosity suggests that they take a walk,

and the Magdalen agrees, vowing that she will go to the world's end with him, her "dere derlyng," and she will, if need be, die for his sake (11. 543-546).

As the lovers exit, the Bad Angel, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil enter, and the Bad Angel gloats over the Magdalen's fall for "pryde callyd coriosite" (11. 547-554). The Devil "trembles and trots with glee," for all hell will, he says, rejoice over winning the Magdalen (11. 555-559).

Time has passed when, in the next scene, we see the Magdalen, alone, enter an "arbor" and announce that she will rest "a-mons thes bamys precyus of prysse" until one of her "valentyne," a "blossom of blysse" who is wont to "halse and kysse" her, will appear (11. 564-571). She falls asleep.

The playwright momentarily moves from the Morality to set the scene for the New Testament story of the anointing of the Christ by a penitent sinner at the house of Simon. At Simon's house we hear Simon announce that he has ordered a dinner to cheer his friends and express his desire that the prophet of "trew perfytnesse" will join the company.

But the playwright immediately switches back to the technique of the Morality as he returns the scene to the Magdalen's arbor to dramatize the Magdalen's repentance. We hear the Good Angel ask the Magdalen why she is so unstable and reprove her for her delight in "fleshly lust" as he warns her that her soul will "lie in hell's fire" if she

does not leave her vain and variable works and let him be her guide (11. 588-601). The Magdalen's repentance is sudden. She laments her sins, vows to seek the prophet who will relieve her by his "oil of mercy." She will take "swete bawmys" to him and sadly follow him "in eche degre" (11. 602-614). She forsakes her worldly lovers for the Christ.

Again at Simon's house, we see Simon and his guests, including Jesus, seated at table, and the Magdalen "follows along" calling herself a cursed caitiff and lamenting her sins but hoping that the good "lord of lorddes," who knows her heart, will reward her with his grace (11. 631-640). She enters Simon's house, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, anoints them with precious "bawmys." Jesus thanks Simon for the great "repast" and tells him the parable of the two debtors, from Luke 7: 41-43, and applies the parable to the Magdalen's washing his feet with tears of her bitter "wepying" and, "lowly knelyng," anointing them with ointment, and wiping them with her hair "fayr and brygth shynning" while Simon, Jesus says, did none of these things. Jesus forgives the woman her "wrecchednesse" and thereby makes her "hol In sowle" (11. 659-677).

The Magdalen blesses Jesus, "lord of ever-lastyng lyfe," "repast contemplatyff," and vows to clothe herself in humility since she has sinned in the "synne of pryde" (11. 678-685). Jesus praises her, for she is, he says, expert in

contrition. She has in her soul, Jesus says, an inward might that has purchased light from darkness. He tells her that her faith has saved her and made her "bryth" and sends her away in peace (11. 686-691).

The seven devils, the stage direction tells us, now leave the Magdalen and, with the Bad Angel, enter "into hell with thondyr" (Part I, sc. 14). The Magdalen thanks Jesus for restoring her soul to health, for removing her from "whanhope" (11. 692-694). Jesus again praises the Magdalen for her contrition and promises her that if she keeps free of negligence, she will be partner of his bliss (699-704).

The Good Angel enters and praises Jesus, "delectabyll Ieusus, sovvereyn sapyens," and asks Jesus to "illumyn ower ygnorans with your devynyte!" He addresses Jesus, "O lux vera," O true light, and asks him to grant his "lucense" so that we will not be seduced by the "spyrt of errour," that we may come to bliss "with your gostely bred to fede vs" (11. 709-721).

The scene switches from the serious to slapstick. In hell, Satan, "hampord with hate," debates with the devils and the Bad Angel, whom Satan calls beetle-browed bitches for having let the Magdalen escape them. The Bad Angel explains that the spirit of grace "temptyd" that "Ipocryte" away from him and the devils. The scene ends with the Bad Angel and the seven demons receiving a beating on the "bottokkys" before they are ordered by Satan to set a house

on fire. While the house burns, the devils sink back to their "felaws blake" (11. 722-747).

We then see the Magdalen back at her castle as she reports to Martha and Lazarus that she has been made clean of her sins by the grace of the "blyssyd prophet," and she vows to apply herself to grace (11. 748-759). Martha praises Jesus, and Lazarus welcomes his sister back to her "towere" (11. 760-767).

The Magdalen then says a prayer in which she echoes the Good Angel's emphasis on Christ the Light. She says:

Cryst, that is the lyth and the cler daye,
 He hath on-curyd the therknesse of the clowdy nyth.
 of lyth the lucens and lyth veray,
 Wos prechyng to vs is a gracyows lyth,
 Lord, we be-seche the, as thou art most of myth,
 Owt of the ded slep of therknesse de-fend vs aye!
 gyff vs grace ewyr to rest In lyth,
 In quyet and In pes to serve the nyth and day!

(11. 768-775)

The Magdalen praises Christ the true light and the clear day, who has uncovered the darkness of the cloudy night, and whose preaching is a gracious light. And while she beseeches him, the light of lights, most powerful, to keep them always from the dead sleep of darkness, to give them grace ever to rest in light and to serve Christ in "quiet and in peace" night and day, Lazarus begins to die.

Lazarus calls out for help (11. 776-783), and the Magdalen tells him to take comfort and says that she and Martha will go get help for him (11. 784-787). They meet Jesus and ask him to help his "lover" Lazarus who is in great distress. Jesus says that he will send his grace to Lazarus (11. 784-801).

When Mary and Martha return to their brother, they find him dying, crying out, "A! deth deth, thou art on-kynd!" (1. 821). They bury Lazarus while the neighbors, clad in black and weeping with "great dolor," join them. The people return to the Magdalen's castle, and the scene moves to Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus tells his disciples that they as "chyldyurn of lyth" will go to Lazarus to save him from grievous sleep, and he announces to his disciples the necessity for his own coming "passion" for redemption of mankind (11. 851-868). Martha and Mary, told by a neighbor that Jesus is coming, run to meet Jesus, and each expresses regret that Jesus had not been there to keep Lazarus from death (11. 873-892).

Jesus calls Lazarus from the grave, and Lazarus praises Jesus for his works of wonder which let men know that nothing is impossible to the Lord, for, Lazarus says, his body and soul were parted asunder and he would have rotted had not Jesus restored him to life (11. 911-920). Now all of the people, the stage direction says, in one voice announce their belief in Jesus (Part I, sc. 20). Jesus thanks them and tells them to go in peace (11. 921-924).

The Digby playwright again switches from the serious to the comic as he sets the scene for the Magdalen's future mission to Marseilles. We see that the Magdalen will have to deal with the "head of all heathendom." The King of Marseilles rants against the blabber-lipped bitches who refuse to bow to his laudable presence, for he is, he says, the head of all heathendom. He boasts of his well-favored wife, "fresh as a falcon," and the queen thanks her husband for his compliments (11. 925-957).

There comes a "cry and Yelle" by a devil who recounts the harrowing of hell by the "King of Joy," who is as bright as a fire's blaze and who has delivered Adam and Abraham and all their kin from "lymbo" into "paradyse" and has gone to Galilee (11. 963-991).

The scene shifts back, both in time and place, to the scene similar to that of the Quem quaeritis plays. In Jerusalem, the Marys lament the death of Jesus. The Magdalen laments first: "Alas! alas! for that ryall bem!" The other Marys lament, and the Magdalen suggests that they go to the monument to anoint Jesus "body and bon" with precious balms to make amends for their "trespas" (11. 1011-1018). Two angels clad in white appear to the women at the sepulchre, and the first angel tells the women that Jesus has arisen and sends them to "sey to his dyspylles and to peter he xall a-pere" (11. 1024-1026). The second angel tells the women that they will see Jesus in Galilee.

The Marys meet Peter and John, and the Magdalen tells them that Christ's body has been borne away and that she fears that it has been defiled (11. 1031-1034). Peter and John, lamenting Jesus' pains, go to the sepulchre with the Magdalen. The Magdalen laments the "dolor and dysseese" that dwells in her heart, and the first angel asks her why she weeps, whom she seeks, "with dolor thus" (11. 1055-1058). Just as she requests that the angel tell her who has borne away her Lord, Jesus appears and, echoing the angel's question, asks the Magdalen whom she seeks. The Magdalen asks Jesus if he has borne away her Lord, for she has, she says, purposed in each degree to have him with her, "the whyche my specyall lord hath be" and she "his lover" (11. 1063-1068).

Jesus says, "O mari!" The Magdalen, recognizing Jesus when he calls her by name, desires to anoint him and to kiss him (11. 1069-1073). But Jesus says, "Towche me natt, mary!" For, he continues, he has not yet ascended to his father, to her father, and he asks her to tell his brothers that he will ascend (11. 1074-1077).

The Magdalen tells Jesus that she at first thought him "Symoyd" the gardener (11. 1078-1079).¹⁰ Jesus answers, "so I am, for-sothe, mary," and he explains that man's heart is his garden, in which he sows seeds of virtue all the year, rends up by root foul weeds and vices, and when the

¹⁰Professor Arnold Williams suggests that the text's "Symovd" should be amended to "Symoyd" since the "v" is probably a "y" that did not altogether print.

garden is watered with tears, he says, virtues spring up and smell full sweet (11. 1081-1085). The Magdalen praises Jesus as a worthy emperor, a high divinity, and says that his words are a joyful tiding, and that unto all people who "after us shall reign" this knowledge of his deity will be joyful (11. 1086-1091). Jesus replies that he will appear to all sinners, as he does to her, if they will seek him with fervent love, and he tells the Magdalen to be steadfast and he will always be with her, and with all those who are "meek" to him (11. 1092-1095).

Jesus exits, and the Magdalen goes to the other Marys to tell them of her joy in seeing Jesus (11. 1096-1103). The other Marys wish that they could see Jesus, and he immediately appears to them. They ask his blessing, and he grants it and sends the Marys to tell his brethren to go to Galilee where they will see him "bodyly, with here carnall yee" (11. 1116-1124). The Magdalen hymns praises to Jesus and his "incarnation" as the Marys go to do Jesus' bidding (11. 1125-1132).

The mood changes as the scene moves back to Marseilles where we get a further glimpse of what the Magdalen's mission to Marseilles will involve. The king is preparing to sacrifice to his gods with "multetude of myrth" (11. 1133-1138). The "presbyter" and his "clericus" ready the altar and indulge in a bawdy "flyting" match with its inevitable finale, a beating for the boy by the outwitted elder.

They perform a parody of the mass and display "Mahound's" relics for the queen and king (11. 1176-1248).

The playwright moves to more sober scenes, to Pilate's place and then to the Magdalen's narration of Christ's death and his ascension to heaven where, the Magdalen says, he is now king. She speaks of his great kindness and of his having given "us knowyng" to understand every language and tells of his disciples having gone to diverse countries to teach and preach of Jesus (11. 1336-1348).

Boldly breaking with Biblical sources, the playwright next pictures Jesus, in heaven, as he hymns his mother the Moon. Jesus tells of his having rested in the moon, in the palace of Phoebus' brightness, in the vessel of pure cleanliness, in his mother, whose goodness, Jesus says, no tongue can express and whose joys no clerk can write. And as Jesus thus hymns his mother, he remembers the kindness of "Mary Maudlyn." He will, he says, send his angel Raphael down to tell her that she is to go by sea to convert the land of Marseilles (11. 1349-1371). Raphael goes to the Magdalen and tells her that she is to be "an holy apostylesse" to Marseilles where she alone will teach all that land God's laws, and the Magdalen goes to find a ship (11. 1386-1394).

There enters a ship with a "mery song," and the Magdalen boards, sails to Marseilles, disembarks, and praying to Christ for victory against the fiend's flame, goes to the king's palace (11. 1446-1453). She beseeches the king, in

the name of Jesus, to let her live in his land, but the king exclaims, "Jesu! what devil is he?" and tells the Magdalen that he will "fell her flat" (11. 1446-1453). The Magdalen tells him that she was sent by Christ to save the king from his "mysbelief" (11. 1466-1469). The king's curiosity is piqued, and he questions her about her god.

The Magdalen gives a day-by-day account of the creation (11. 1488-1566). The king says that she is right, but his gods, not hers, did these things. He threatens to cut out her tongue (11. 1527-1530). The Magdalen, speaking gently, asks the king to tell her of his gods (11. 1531-1534).

The king orders all his people to the temple and takes the Magdalen to view his god's power. He begs his god to speak to this "Christian" but gets no answer (11. 1539-1547). The Magdalen asks permission to pray to her God to show the king a miracle (11. 1548-1551). The king tells her to pray her fill, till her knees ache (1. 1552), and as the Magdalen prays for enlightenment and for protection of her life, the idol in the temple quakes (11. 1553-1554). She again prays, asking Christ's goodness to descend to his "lover," and a cloud comes from heaven, sets the temple on fire, and the priest and the clerk "sink" (11. 1555-1558).

The king then tells the Magdalen that he and his wife have been together many years, but his wife could never conceive a child. He promises to obey the Magdalen's God if the Magdalen can find a means of making his wife conceive (11. 1563-1570). The Magdalen tells the king to believe

in her God, and she expresses hope that the queen will soon conceive (11. 1571-1574). The king retires to his chamber.

The Magdalen prays to Christ to conserve and keep her, for she is hungry and thirsty (11. 1579-1586). Jesus appears in heaven and says that his grace will grow and descend to "mary my lover" to amend her state (1. 1588). He sends two angels to lead her with "reverent light" to the king's chamber to ask for some of his goods (1. 1594).

The angels, clothed in white, come to the Magdalen. She exclaims, "O gracyus god, now I vnderstond!" as she explicates the meaning of the clothing of white as a "tokening" of meekness and says that she will obey Jesus with "lowlynesse" (11. 1607-1610). The angels, carrying lights, then lead the Magdalen to the king's chamber where the Magdalen addresses the king as troublous, "froward," and mad, and asks him to change his mood and give her of his goods to save her from hunger, thirst, and cold (11. 1611-1618).

The king awakens, "mery and glad," and recounts to the queen his marvellous dream in which he saw a fair woman clad in white and led by a bright angel, and he heard the woman speak sad words to him (11. 1619-1626). The queen says that she also saw the vision and thought that their room would have burned because of the light which was all about, and that she too heard the "wordes of dred" telling the queen and king to help those in need by giving of their goods (11. 1627-1634).

The king sends a knight to fetch "that woman," and the Magdalen gladly comes (11. 1638-1646). She prays the "high trinity" to be with the king and asks the king what he wants of her (11. 1647-1650). When the king tells the "fair woman" that it is his delight to refresh her with food, money, and clothes, the Magdalen assures him that he will fulfill God's commandment if he sustains "poor folk" in trouble (11. 1651-1656). The king then asks the "blyssyd woman" to rehearse the joys of her Lord (11. 1657-1658).

The Magdalen blesses the hour that the king accepted God's laws and tells him that his wife is great with child, as the king had desired (11. 1659-1668). The queen promptly feels the child stir in her womb, blesses the Magdalen as the root of their salvation, and vows to worship the Magdalen's God with due reverence (11. 1669-1672). The king then asks the "fair woman" what her name is, and the Magdalen replies, "Mary maudleyn with-owtyn blame" (1. 1676).

The king addresses her as blessed Mary and thanks her God and "specyally ye" (11. 1677-1680). She tells the king that he shall thank Peter, her master, who will "christen" him against the "fiends power" (11. 1681-1685). The king, glad of the news, places her in charge of his property until he returns to Marseilles. The queen wants to go with the king to be made a "christian woman" by Peter, but the king asks her why, when she is with child, she desires to go. The queen's pleading, however, brings the king to agree that she may go with him. He asks that Jesus and this blessed

woman, the Magdalen, be their guide (11. 1698-1711). As the Magdalen gives them the blessing of God, a ship appears on the scene.

The king and queen, after a bit of banter with the shipman, set sail for the Holy Land. The queen prays to the Magdalen, "blessyd lady," flower of womanhood, to save them from drowning on the voyage (11. 1746-1749), and the king tells the queen to have no fear but to trust in the Magdalen who will save them from perils by praying to God for them (11. 1750-1753).

The queen suddenly gives birth to her child, and without woman's help in her "nede," dies. She calls on "mary Maudleyne" to lead her soul and commits herself to God's hands (11. 1754-1766). The king, fearing that his child will also die, prays to God to release his soul from sorrow (11. 1767-1775).

A storm rages, and the shipman's boy says that the dead body on board causes the storm and therefore must be cast out (11. 1779-1781). The king pleads that instead of throwing his wife's body into the sea, they place it, with his child, on a rock. The shipman agrees, and as the king places his wife and child on the stone, he kisses them and prays to "blyssyd Mavdleyne" to be their guide (11. 1792-1797).

The ship reaches the Holy Land, the king pays his fare, gives the shipman and his boy a tip, and goes ashore. He finds Peter and explains that a woman named "mary Maudleyne,"

of whom he thinks no guile, has sent him to Peter to be baptized (11. 1820-1828). Peter baptizes the king and leads him through the "stations" and blesses him when he leaves for Marseilles.

The king finds the same shipman who had brought him to the Holy Land and has the shipman return him to Marseilles. From the ship the king sights the rock on which his wife and child had been left, finds both the queen and the boy alive, and praises God. The queen hymns praise to the "almyty maydn," her soul's comfort, to the "demur maudlyn," her body's sustenance and her guide into the Holy Land where she has seen Christ's cross and sepulchre, gone to the "stations," and been baptized (11. 1900-1911). The king thanks Jesus and the Magdalen for preserving his wife and child (11. 1912-1915).

They sail to Marseilles and disembark to find the Magdalen preaching to the people (11. 1924-1939). Her sermon is Christ's "Sermon on the Mount." The king hails the Magdalen as the health of their souls and "repast contemp-latyff," tabernacle of the blessed trinity, comfortable succor for man and wife (11. 1940-1943). The queen hails the Magdalen as chosen and chaste of women alone, whose nobleness the queen has not, she says, wit to tell, and praises the Magdalen for her high "holynesse" which saved the queen and her child on the rock of "ston" (11. 1944-1947).

The Magdalen welcomes the royal family home, tells them that they have become God's knights, and returns the king's property to him. She then announces that she will labor forth to purchase more "spiritual strength" (11. 1960-1961). The queen and the king beg the "blessyd Mary, sweet succor," to pity them and so not depart from them (11. 1962-1965). But the Magdalen, after telling them that she will always remember them and be their "bede-woman," gives them her blessing and goes into the wilderness (11. 1966-1969).

The queen and king lament their loss of this "lady fre," their guide and governor, the sweet "syppresse," whose departure has left them neither "game nor glee," but the king will now, he says, build churches and punish severely anyone who will speak against his new faith, for "Mahound" and his laws the king now defies (11. 1973-1989).

The Magdalen as a missionary to Marseilles, then, not only preaches Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but she also brings about the queen's conception of a child, protects a ship at sea, restores the queen to life, and preserves the life of both the queen and her child.

The Magdalen's next role in the Digby play is that of a hermit. The Digby playwright telescopes her last thirty years of life spent on the desert and shows her not only as a "contemplatyff" but also as Christ's "wel-belovyd frynd" who kisses the earth as she dies. We see her in the desert where, she says, she will abide to save her "sowle from synne,"

loving her lord, living in humility, in charity at the reverence of "ower blyssyd lady," and in abstinence as her conscience craves of her (11. 1997-1999). She forsakes all worldly food to be "contemplatyff" (11. 2001-2003).

The scene moves to heaven where Jesus praises the sweetness of prayers sent up to him by his "wel-belovyd frynd with-owt" variance, whom he will relieve with spiritual food (11. 2004-2006). He tells the angels to carry her up into the clouds to feed her "manna," and the angels, praising him, descend to the wilderness.

An angel tells the Magdalen that she will be enhanced in heaven above virgins, she will be honored with joy and reverence and received into the clouds to be given spiritual food (11. 2020-2027). The Magdalen, full of joy, is lifted into the clouds with "reverent song" where she praises Jesus and thanks him for filling her with so great felicity, which shows her "game and glee" (11. 2032-2039).

A priest enters the wilderness, and he asks Jesus to let him see that "person" who is the center of the great "mystery" shown from heaven, "with grett myrth and melody" (11. 2040-2045). He sees the Magdalen and hails her as Christ's delection, sweeter than sugar or "cypresse," and tells her that she is great with God for perfectness. She is, he says, the Joy of Jerusalem, whom he has not seen for this thirty "wynter and more" (11. 2046-2053).

When the priest asks her to tell him of her lord, the Magdalen answers that she has been lifted to heaven three

times a day for thirty years and that she has spoken only with God's bright angels. She welcomes the priest and tells him that the time has now come for her to ascend (11. 2054-2071).

As the priest returns to his cell, the scene flashes again to heaven where Jesus says that the Magdalen will have a crown and dwell in joy, forever saved. He sends his angels to tell the priest to "hossell" Mary (11. 2074-2081). One angel goes to the priest while the other goes to the Magdalen to tell her that she will this day be received with angels' song, for her soul will depart from her body (11. 2094-2097). The Magdalen, delighted, is given by the priest the "bred of lyf" to bring her soul to everlasting light, and she praises God for the celestial bread which will illumine her soul to bliss (11. 2102-2113). She asks her Lord to open his blessed gates and kisses the earth:

thys erth at thys tyme fervently I kysse.

(1. 2115)

She commends her spirit to God and dies.

The angels take her soul to heaven where a merry song is sung for the Magdalen. The priest hymns to the Magdalen of her great solace to dwell in heaven's bliss with "glee" and says that he will take care of the body of Mary and give it to the bishop to bury "by name" with all reverence and solemnity (11. 2124-2132). The priest then announces that the play is over, blesses the audience, and requests the

"clerkys with woycys cler" to sing the Te Deum (11. 2133-2140).

We have seen, then, that the Magdalen of the Digby play has sometime acquired a family, a past, a many-sided character. She has become as "great as God for perfectness," a very goddess. We have seen her as the daughter of Cyrus and the sister of Martha and Lazarus, as a "beryl of beauty," as a lover of fine wines, as the lover of wordly men, as Jesus' anointer who dried his feet with her hair "fair and bright shining," as the "lover" of the Christ, as "an holy apostylesse" to Marseilles, as a restorer and preserver of life, as a hermit living in the desert for thirty years. We have seen her bring about the queen's conception of a child. We have seen her protect a ship at sea. And we have seen her fervently kiss this earth as she dies.

The Magdalen of the Digby play raises many questions. Why, for instance, doesn't one of the other Marys, who, in the Quem quaeritis plays, goes to the sepulchre seeking Christ, become a central figure in later medieval plays? Why doesn't Martha, who, according to Jacobus à Voragine, slays a dragon, attain the stature of heroine in literature? For what reasons is the Magdalen given such literary prominence? And where does the Digby playwright find the attributes which make his heroine a complex figure, a woman with a past and a future far beyond the moment of her life shown in the Quem quaeritis plays?

Every question implies, as E. H. Gombrich points out in Art and Illusion, a tentative hypothesis. "We look for something," Gombrich says, "because our hypothesis makes us expect certain results." We see if those results follow, and if they do not we must revise our hypothesis, and the hypothesis which finally survives "we feel entitled to hold, pro tempore."¹¹

Implicit in the Magdalen questions are the hypotheses that nothing grows from nothing, that man's imagination works through eclectic syncretism of the old in the creation of the new, that the literary figure of the Magdalen results from the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels, and that there are probable reasons for the shaping of myths around the Magdalen rather than around any other feminine figure.

To observe the shaping of myths around the Magdalen is at once to deepen understanding of the human imagination and to broaden understanding of the literary figure of the Magdalen. To look closely at the beginnings of the mythical Magdalen, I examine, as does no other study which I have seen, the Magdalen pictured in apocryphal writings from the early Christian period. For becoming aware of her significance in these earliest attempts to create a Christian literature is, I think, of deep importance in seeing in

¹¹E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion, a study in the psychology of pictorial representation (Bollingen Series XXXV, 5, New York, second revised edition, 1961), p. 321.

perspective the Magdalen who becomes the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby play.

As do others concerned with the study of the Magdalen, I too look at the figure in the New Testament canonical gospels and at the other New Testament figures with whom she is early identified. We can, in fact, begin to find answers to the questions concerning the literary figure of the Magdalen by viewing closely the Mary Magdalene of the canonical gospels and by noting the myth as it begins to take shape in the identification of the Magdalen with other New Testament figures before we examine the figure in the apocryphal writings.

CHAPTER II

MARY MAGDALENE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANONICAL GOSPELS AND OTHER NEW TESTAMENT FIGURES WITH WHOM SHE IS IDENTIFIED

Although the Magdalen is named only fourteen times in the canonical gospels, she is mentioned in each of them, five times by John, four times by Mark, twice by Luke, and three times by Matthew. In the Gospel of Matthew we see the Magdalen first with the mother of James and of Joseph, and with the mother of the sons of Zebedee at the crucifixion of Jesus, "at a distance," among the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.¹²

Erant autem ibi mulieres multae a longe,
quae secutae erant Jesum a Galilaea,
ministrantes ei. Inter quas erat Maria
Magdalene, et Maria Jacobi, et Joseph
mater, et mater filiorum Zebedaei.

(Matthew 27: 55-56)

We then see her with the "other Mary" sitting opposite the sepulchre where Joseph of Arimathea has placed the body

¹²All Biblical references throughout this study are to the Biblia Sacra, Juxta Vulgatum Clementinam, printed in Belgium, 1956.

of Jesus.

Erat autem ibi Maria Magdalene, et altera
Maria, sedentes contra sepulchrum.

(Matthew 27: 61)

Matthew then mentions her with the other Mary going three days later, late on the Sabbath as the first day of the week began to dawn, to see the sepulchre.

Vespere autem sabbati, quae lucescit in
prima sabbati, venit Maria Magdalene et
altera Maria videre sepulchrum.

(Matthew 28: 1)

And an angel appears, tells the women not to be afraid for Jesus has arisen, shows them the empty tomb, and asks them to report the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples. And the women quickly go, "cum timore et gaudio magno" (Matthew 28: 8), in fear and great joy, to tell the disciples. They meet Jesus on the way, embrace his feet, and worship him. And Jesus tells them not to be afraid but to go tell his brothers that they should go to Galilee where they will see him (Matthew 28: 2-10). Matthew does not mention the women again.

The Gospel of Mark also first mentions the Magdalen with Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joseph, and Salome, among the many women who had followed Jesus and ministered to him, looking on the crucifixion from a distance (Mark 15: 40-41). And we see Mary Magdalene and Mary

the mother of Joseph at the burial beholding the monument where Jesus is placed by Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15: 47) . But in the Gospel of Mark we find an event not mentioned in Matthew: the three women, when the Sabbath is past, buy spices in order that they may go to anoint Jesus.

Et cum transisset sabbatum, Maria Magdalene,
et Maria Jacobi, et Salome emerunt aromata ut
venientes ungerent Jesum.

(Mark 16: 1)

There follows the journey to the monument on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, just at the rising of the sun, "orto jam sole" (Mark 16: 2), where the women see a young man, "juvenum," enveloped in a shining white robe, "coopertum stola candida" (Mark 16: 5), and they are told by the young man not to fear, for Jesus has arisen, and are asked to take the message to the disciples "and Peter." But here again Mark differs from Matthew in showing the women filled with fear and trembling and taking flight from the monument. "But they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

At illae exeuntes, fugerunt de monumento;
invaserat enim eas tremor et pavor; et
nemini quidquam dixerunt: timebant enim.

(Mark 16: 8)

Mark's account further differs from Matthew's in mentioning that the resurrected Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene,

"from whom he had ejected seven demons."

Surgens autem mane, prima sabbati, apparuit
primo Mariae Magdalene, de qua ejecerat septem
demonia.

(Mark 16: 9)

Mary Magdalene goes to tell those who had been with Jesus, as they are "mourning and lamenting," and they do not believe her (Mark 16: 10-11). This is Mark's final mention of the Magdalen, but he emphasizes the incredulity of the disciples.

We see that in Mark's gospel the Magdalen is isolated from the other women as the one to whom the risen Christ first appears and as the "apostle" to the doubting apostles. Two other attributes here given the Magdalen become important in her character as it is reflected in drama and in iconography: her role as one of the Marys who had bought ointment to anoint the body of Christ, and the parenthetical identification of her as a woman who had been possessed of seven demons. We have seen the heroine of the Digby play possessed of seven real demons, and we have seen her as one of the Marys going to the sepulchre to anoint the body of Christ.

Luke also attributes to the Magdalen the past possession of seven demons, "Maria, quae vocatur Magdalene de qua septem demonia exierant" (Luke 8: 3), in his first mention of her among the women who accompanied Jesus in his journeying through cities and towns, preaching and spreading the

gospel. The Magdalen is, however, in Luke's gospel, simply one of the many women who go to the tomb taking spices to anoint the body of Christ, who are greeted by two angels, and who go to report Christ's having arisen to the apostles. To the apostles the words of the women seem like mad ravings, and they do not believe them.

Erat autem Maria Magdalene, et Joanna, et Maria Jacobi, et ceterae quae cum eis erant, quae dicebant ad apostolos haec. Et visa sunt ante illos, sicut deliramentum, verba ista; et non crediderunt illis.

(Luke 24: 10-11)

The Magdalen is, then, in Luke's gospel given no particular importance, since she is mentioned only twice and then in company with all the women followers of Jesus.

John's gospel reflects, however, a special interest in the Magdalen, as well as in Mary the mother of Jesus, and it provides the setting not only for the garden recognition scenes of the Magdalen and the risen Christ, to become popular in medieval drama and iconography, but also for the medieval crucifixion scenes, the Pietas, with Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, John, and sometimes another woman standing at the foot of the cross. And the recognition scene, uniquely narrated by John, is, of course, the indirect cause for the invention in France of Saint Rabony.

The Magdalen is first mentioned in the Gospel of John in the scene at the cross where she stands with Jesus'

mother and his aunt and with the disciple whom Jesus loved,
 "et discipulum stantem quem diligebat" (John 19: 26).

Stabant autem juxta crucem Jesu mater ejus,
 et soror matris ejus, Maria Cleophae, et
 Maria Magdalene.

(John 19: 25)

The next Magdalen scene in the Gospel of John follows the account of Nicodemus' anointing the body of Jesus and placing the body in a new monument, in which no one had ever been placed, "monumentum novum, in quo nondum quisquam positus erat" (John 19: 41), in a garden near the place where Jesus was crucified. Mary Magdalene goes early, while it is still dark, to the tomb and sees that the stone has been taken from the monument.

Una autem sabbati, Maria Magdalene venit
 mane, cum adhuc tenebrae essent, ad monumentum,
 et vidit lapidem sublatum a monumento.

(John 20: 1)

She runs to Simon Peter and the "other disciple whom Jesus loved," traditionally identified as John, and tells them: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and I do not know where they have put him" (John 20: 2-3).

There follows another scene which is to become popular in medieval drama, the race of Peter and John to the tomb. Peter and John see the empty grave, but not understanding, they return home. On the contrary, Mary Magdalene stands

outside the monument, weeping, "Maria autem stabat ad monumentum foris, plorans" (John 20: 11). While she laments, she leans over and looks into the tomb, sees two angels who ask her why she weeps. She answers, turns around, and sees Jesus but does not know that he is Jesus. And then comes the dramatic narration of the recognition scene, unique in the gospels.

Jesus asks the Magdalen: "Woman, why are you weeping; whom do you seek? Quem quaeris?" (John 20: 15). The Magdalen, believing that he is the gardener, answers: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have placed him and I will take him up."

Jesus says: "Maria!" She turns around and says to Jesus: "Rabboni," and obviously reaches out to touch him or to embrace him, for he says, "Noli me tangere" (John 20: 16-17), for he has not yet, he says, ascended to his Father. He then tells Mary to go to his brothers and tell them that he will ascend to his Father, "and your Father, to my God and your God," et Patrem vestrum, Deum meum, et Deum vestrum " (John 20: 17). Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples announcing that she has seen the Lord and he has told her this (John 20: 18).

The Magdalen in the Gospel of John is, then, pictured in a much more intimate relationship with Jesus than she is in the other canonical gospels. She stands at the foot of the cross with the mother and the aunt of Jesus and with

his well-beloved disciple. She goes alone at dawn to the tomb seeking Christ, finds the tomb empty, and runs to tell Peter and John that the body has been taken away. And after the disciples leave the tomb, the Magdalen stands alone outside the sepulchre, lamenting, until Jesus appears to her in the garden. And Jesus makes sure that she recognizes him by calling her by her name; he refuses to let her touch him now but sends her to announce to his disciples his coming ascension.

The Digby playwright, we recall, augments John's recognition scene between the Magdalen and Jesus and so further emphasizes the close relationship between the Magdalen and the Christ. The Gospel of John omits, however, the scene shown in that of Mark and of Luke, and used by the Digby playwright, of the women going to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. And John does not mention the Magdalen's having been possessed of seven demons. Instead, John's gospel isolates the Magdalen, and in dramatizing her close relationship with Jesus makes her a figure of such importance in the resurrection scene central to Christianity that imaginations reach out for more knowledge of the woman to whom the risen Christ appeared in flesh still sensitive to touch and to whom the risen Christ spoke in a human voice.

The appeal of John's picture of the Magdalen searching for and lamenting the dead Christ and happily finding him resurrected is, I think, catholic in the deepest sense of

the word. The appeal is universal, omnitemporal, for behind the Christian figures in the picture are shadows of antique figures of other deaths and resurrections. And these shadows are still visible behind the Digby playwright's augmented version of John's Magdalen searching for and lamenting the dead Christ and joyously finding him resurrected.

That early Christians hearing John's narration of Christ's resurrection felt a deep sense of similarity between the Magdalen, searching for and lamenting Christ, and a goddess, an Ishtar, an Isis, a Venus, searching for and lamenting a Tammuz, an Osiris, an Adonis, seems to me highly probable. Similarities between the death and resurrection of gods of antiquity and that of the Christ have, of course, been noted by a number of scholars. Scholars such as, for example, Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough,¹³ Joseph Campbell in The Hero With a Thousand Faces,¹⁴ and Herbert Weisinger in Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,¹⁵ have pointed up parallels, as well as differences, between the ancient fertility rites and the death and resurrection of the Christ.

¹³Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, a Study in Magic and Religion (New York, 1922; one-volume abridged edition, New York, 1960).

¹⁴Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York, 1949; Meridian Book, 3rd printing, 1960).

¹⁵Herbert Weisinger, Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall (East Lansing, Michigan, 1953).

That people during the early centuries of Christianity were quite aware of celebrations of gods and goddesses we know from the writings of early Christians as well as from those of non-Christians. In the Acts of the Apostles 19: 27-28, for example, the citizens of Ephesus are shown praising Diana, and Saint Augustine in his The City of God (Book II, 4) speaks of his youthful pleasure in the "shameful games which were celebrated in honor of gods and goddesses," such as Cybele, the mother of all gods. Apuleius describes in his Metamorphoses (Book XI, chapter 47) his worship of Isis, the "many-named" goddess.

E. K. Chambers says, in The Medieval Stage, that "side by side with the conception of the heaven-god comes that of his female counterpart, who is also, though less clearly, indicated in all the mythologies." Chambers describes her, in her earliest aspect, as the "lady of the woods and of the blossoming fruitful earth."¹⁶ It is, I think, because the Magdalen pictured in the Gospel of John's account of the resurrection of Christ suggested, consciously or unconsciously, to early Christians goddesses familiar to them that the Magdalen excited their imaginations and brought about the attribution to her of characteristics beyond those found in the figure pictured in the canonical gospels.

¹⁶E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage (Oxford, 1903), I, 105.

We have seen her in the four canonical gospels as a woman from whom, according to Mark and Luke, seven devils had been ejected. She is one of the many women, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, and who stood afar off at the crucifixion. Or she is, according to John, the one who stands with Jesus' mother and his aunt and John at the foot of the cross.

She goes with the "other Mary," according to Matthew and Mark, or with the other women, according to Luke, or alone, according to John, to see, according to Matthew and John, or to anoint, according to Mark and Luke, the Christ. And with the other Mary, Marys, or alone, she is told by one angel (Matthew and Mark) or by two angels (Luke and John) that Christ has arisen, and she is sent and goes (Luke, John, Matthew), or does not go (Mark) to tell the apostles who believe (Matthew and John) or who do not believe (Luke). Although the risen Christ appears only to the disciples, according to Luke, while, according to Matthew, he first appears to the Marys, he appears first to the Magdalen, according to Mark's statement and according to John's dramatic narration.

These inconsistencies noted in the canonical gospel accounts of the resurrection of Christ bring about, of course, inconsistencies of details found in medieval plays and in iconography, where we find, for example, sometimes two, sometimes three, Marys going to the tomb, now one angel

and again two angels at the sepulchre. And the three synoptic gospels, those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, provide the basis for the first recorded resurrection plays of the tenth and eleventh centuries as well as for the iconographic representations of the sepulchre of Christ as it occurs in art, according to Neil C. Brooks,¹⁷ from the fourth century into the latter part of the twelfth century when for the first time the actual moment of the resurrection is depicted in art.

The synoptic gospel references to the Magdalen provide, then, a model for the figure pictured in extant Christian plays of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and John's gospel provides the model for the Magdalen in the recognition scenes of the twelfth-century resurrection plays in which the figure of Christ is first actually represented in the drama. The fifteenth-century Digby heroine also retains characteristics found in the Mary Magdalene sketched in the four canonical gospels. She is one of the Marys who go to the tomb to anoint the body of Christ, she is the first to whom the risen Christ appears, and she has seven devils ejected from her.

Although these characteristics form the skeleton for the Digby heroine, they do not account for the Magdalen whom

¹⁷Neil C. Brooks, "The Sepulchre of Christ in Art and Liturgy, with Special Reference to the Liturgic Drama," in University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature (Urbana, Ill., May, 1921), Vol. VII, no. 2, pp. 7 and 13.

we have seen as the daughter of Cyrus and the sister of Martha and Lazarus, or for the woman whom we have seen sipping wine in a tavern, waiting for her "valentynes" in an arbor, anointing the feet of Jesus and drying them with her hair "fair and bright shining," sailing to Marseilles as "an holy apostylesse," converting a king and queen by bringing about the queen's conception of a child, protecting a ship at sea, living as a hermit for thirty years, and kissing the earth as she dies. Nor do the characteristics found in the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels altogether account for the numerous and varied monuments to the omnitemporal figure of the Magdalen.

Early Christian imaginations reach beyond the gospels' specific references to the Magdalen in order to fulfill a desire for a more complex feminine figure closely associated with the Christ. Very early the Magdalen was popularly identified with the woman, told of in Luke 7: 36-50, who was a sinner in the city, "quae erat in civitate peccatrix" (7: 37), and who, carrying an alabaster of ointment, went to the house of Simon the Pharisee while Jesus was there, washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them. And despite Simon's bitter mutterings against the sinner and against Jesus' allowing her to touch him, Jesus released her of her many sins because she had "loved much," and bade her go in peace for her faith had, Jesus said, made her whole, "Fides tua salvam

fecit; vade in pace" (Luke 7: 50). We have seen the Digby heroine in a slightly modified version of the sinner who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them.

With the identification of the Magdalen as Luke's anonymous sinner, it was possible for the imagination to specify the Magdalen as a prostitute who had "loved much" and who visibly expressed her love for Jesus. Along with this addition to the Magdalen came the identification of her with the woman who, having an alabaster of precious ointment, anointed Jesus while he was at table with his disciples in Bethany, as told, with minor variations, in Matthew 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9, and John 12: 1-8. In all three accounts, the disciples are shown complaining about the woman's waste of the precious ointment, and Jesus is pictured scolding his disciples and telling them that the woman has anointed him against his burial. The gospels of Matthew and Mark add prophetic words of Jesus, words which have been throughout the centuries applied by her devotees to the Magdalen. Jesus says of the woman of Bethany to his disciples: "Amen I say to you, wherever this gospel will be preached in the whole world, this also that she has done will be narrated in memory of her."

Amen dico vobis, ubicumque praedicatum fuerit
evangelium istud in universo mundo, et quod
fecit haec narrabitur in memoriam ejus.

(Mark 14: 9)

Since John names the woman Mary and links her with Martha who serves the meal, the Magdalen is also identified with Martha's sister who, according to Luke 10: 38-42, was praised by Jesus for having chosen the best part, "Maria optimam partem elegit" (Luke 10: 42), by sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha complained about having to do all the serving. From this identification of Mary Magdalene with Martha's sister comes the early Church Fathers' view of the Magdalen as the figure of the contemplative life and of Martha as the figure of the active life. The Digby playwright makes use of this attribute given to the Magdalen in his picture of her as a contemplative in the desert, but the playwright goes beyond the early Church Fathers' interpretations of the contemplative.

Through John's account of the raising of Lazarus (John 11: 1-44), another characteristic is added to the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament. John identifies Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus with the woman of Bethany who had anointed Jesus and dried his feet with her hair (John 11: 2), and the Magdalen becomes that Mary whose weeping for her dead brother Lazarus moved Jesus to tears, "Et lacrymatus est Jesus" (John 11: 35). Although the Digby playwright's heroine is the sister of Martha and Lazarus, she does not, as she does in other medieval works, move Jesus to tears.

The Magdalen, through early identifications of her with other canonical gospel figures, takes on, as we see,

attributes beyond those found in the specific New Testament references to her. She becomes Martha's sister whose weeping moved Jesus to tears; the anointer of Jesus at Bethany; the prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with precious ointment, the prostitute whom Jesus released of her sins, for she had loved much.

The Magdalen becomes, in the early centuries of the Christian era, indeed the anointer of the "Anointed." It is no wonder that from the identification of the Magdalen with the prostitute who anoints the Christ are derived her most popular medieval iconographic attributes: her ointment jar and her long flowing hair. We have seen her life as a prostitute telescoped in the Digby play, and we have seen the Digby playwright's allusion to her long fair hair, but we have not yet found the basis for the whole complex literary figure represented in the Digby play.

Early Christian imaginations continue the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene of the canonical gospels so that the feminine figure close to the Christ grows in complexity. And the writers of apocryphal works increase the complexity of the Magdalen just as they augment the importance of her closeness to the Christ.

CHAPTER III

THE MAGDALEN IN APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

The attempt to enlarge the feminine figure pictured in John's gospel as the woman closest to the Christ by incorporating into her person other women mentioned in the New Testament seems to me convincing evidence of the efforts of early Christians to create a feminine counterpart for Christ. The results of these efforts deeply affect the literary figure of the Magdalen, the complex Magdalen whose long life is dramatized in the Digby play. The apocryphal writings give further evidence of the desire to place the Magdalen in the role of Christ's companion. The Magdalen is, for example, specifically referred to in the Gospel of Philip, a work dating from the fourth or fifth century, as "Magdalene, whom men called Jesus' companion."¹⁸

The apocryphal writings, Schneemelcher points out, are a result of the diversity of doctrine in early Christianity (NTA, I, 64), and they indicate that the living oral traditions linger on even after the fixing of the canon

¹⁸New Testament Apocrypha, ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. into English by R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia, 1963), I, 277--hereafter referred to as NTA.

(NTA, I, 78). The apocryphal writings are also a result of early attempts to create a Christian literature, with Christian heroes and heroines.

Although, as Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman observe, many of the apocryphal writings were designated as gnostic, and therefore as heretical, by early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus of the second century, Hippolytus of the third century, and Epiphanius of the fourth century,¹⁹ the boundaries between gnosticism and Catholicism remained, according to Schneemelcher (NTA, II, 177), fluctuating for a considerable time. The apocryphal writings are not, then, strictly either Catholic or gnostic. They combine elements of both.

The apocrypha, as Montague Rhodes James notes in his preface to The Apocryphal New Testament, "record the imaginations, hopes, and fears of the men who wrote them; they show what was acceptable to the unlearned Christians of the first ages, what interested them, what they admired, what ideals they cherished for this life, what they would find in the next." It is, I think, because the apocrypha record desires and fears of men, learned or unlearned, that they have, as James says, "indeed exercised an influence (wholly disproportionate to their intrinsic merits) so great and so

¹⁹Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, The Secret Sayings of Jesus (New York, 1960), pp. 62-63.

widespread" on medieval art and literature.²⁰

The Magdalen shown in the apocrypha reflects, however obliquely, a desire and a fear deep-rooted in humanity: a desire for continuity and a fear of mortality. But the Magdalen in the apocrypha also reflects a paradoxical desire for and fear of sexual intercourse, for she is used in apocryphal writings as a vessel for the dualistic view of matter as evil and feminine, of spirit as good and male. The paradoxical awe of sexual union is evident in the ambivalent view of the "companion" of Christ, the Magdalen who is now woman, and again female "matter" become male "spirit," or a goddess of wisdom. Behind the ambivalent attitude toward the Magdalen there lies not only the desire to continue the old by uniting it with the new, to keep alive antique goddesses and Eastern dualistic ideas in the new Christianity, but there lies also the fear of mortality, of death, and of "corruption" through sexual union of the male-spirit with the female-matter, a fear, of course, at odds with the desire for continuity of human life.

As a vessel for these unconscious fears and desires, the Magdalen, sometimes called Mariham, Mariamme, or Mary, figures prominently in a number of apocryphal works. She is the chief questioner in two works called the Questions of Mary, the Great Questions and the Little Questions, as she

²⁰Montague Rhodes James, The Apocryphal New Testament (1st edition, Oxford, 1924; corrected edition, 1960), p. xiii.

is in the Books of the Savior and in the Pistis Sophia.

She is in the second century, Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman point out, famous as a link in the handing down of the secrets of revealed gnosticism.²¹ She is a link between Jesus and the disciples as well as between gnosticism and orthodox Christianity. To the Magdalen is, in fact, attributed the Gospel of Mary.²²

The Gospel of Mary is in the form of a dialogue, suggestive of Plato's dialogues, and from the fragment we can see the important role given the Magdalen as the privileged possessor of "gnosis," of mystical knowledge, given her by Jesus. The gospel reflects also an ambivalence toward woman, an ambivalence that results from the dualistic view of the female as matter and the male as spirit. The gospel is concerned with the nature of matter, of sin, and of

²¹Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, The Secret Sayings of Jesus, p. 76.

²²The fragment of the Gospel of Mary, discovered in 1896 and contained in the Coptic Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, comes from the fifth century, according to Robert M. Grant, editor of Gnosticism, a source book of heretical writings from the early Christian period (New York, 1961), p. 63. Another fragment of the gospel, in Greek (listed by C. H. Roberts in the "Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library," Manchester, 1938, III, no. 463), is assigned to the third century. Since Irenaeus refers to the Gospel of Mary, the original cannot date later than the second century. The Coptic text has been edited by Walter Till in Die gnostischen Schriften der koptischen Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (Berlin, 1955), and Till's edition has been, with the use of the Coptic text, revised and translated into English by E. R. Hardy. I refer to Hardy's translation published in Robert M. Grant's Gnosticism, a source book, pp. 65-68.

revealed gnosis, and it includes the Magdalen's account of the journey of the soul through the Aeons. Although the doctrines set forth are foggy, the picture of the Magdalen's place in the gospel is quite clear.

The first six pages of the Coptic papyrus are lost; the fragment opens with a question concerning matter.

"Will, then, matter be saved or not?" (Gnosticism, p. 65)

The Savior answers that all natures, all formed things, all creatures, exist in and with one another and will again be resolved into their own roots, because the nature of matter is dissolved into the roots of its nature alone. "For this reason," Jesus says, "you come into existence and die."

After Jesus' answer, Peter asks what the sin of the world is, and Jesus replies that sin as such does not exist but "you make sin when you do what is of the nature of fornication." Jesus warns the disciples against being led astray, tells them that the Son of Man is within them, sends them to preach the gospel, and goes away. They are grieved and ask how they can go preach the gospel when even the Son of Man was not spared.

Then Mary stands up and tells them not to mourn or grieve or be irresolute, for the peace of Jesus will be with them and protect them. "Let us rather," she says, "praise his greatness, for he prepared us and made us into men." And the disciples' hearts change for the better (Gnosticism, p. 66).

Peter says to Mary, "Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than other women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you have in mind since you know them, and we do not; nor have we heard them." Mary says, "What is hidden from you I will impart to you," and she tells them of her having seen Jesus in a vision and of her reporting it to Jesus who said to her: "Blessed are you, since you did not waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is there is your countenance." Mary reports that she then asked Jesus if the mind which sees the vision sees it through the spirit or through the soul, and Jesus answered, she says, through neither, for the mind which sees the vision is between the soul and the spirit. The discourse is, perhaps not unfortunately, broken off by the loss of three pages from the papyrus (Gnosticism, p. 66).

The next portion of the Gospel of Mary shows the Magdalen telling the disciples of the journey of the soul through the "powers," the fourth of which has seven forms, all participants in wrath and including darkness, desire, ignorance, "arousing of death," and the "kingdom of the flesh." The seven ask the soul, "Whence do you come, killer of men, or where are you going, conqueror of space?" The soul answers that her "desire" has come to an end, and "ignorance" is dead, that she has been saved from "a world in a world," and that from this time she "will rest in the time of the moment of the Aeon in silence" (Gnosticism, p. 67).

Andrew asks the other disciples (Gnosticism, p. 68) if they believe these words, for he does not believe that the Savior said them, "for certainly these teachings are," he says, "of other ideas." Peter does not believe the words either and says, "Did Jesus then speak secretly with a woman in preference to us, and not openly? Are we to turn back and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?"

The Magdalen is grieved and asks Peter if he thinks that she thought these things up herself and that she is lying about the Savior. Levi comes to the defense of the Magdalen and scolds Peter for his anger and for "contending against the woman like the adversaries." Levi says, "But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Savior knew her well. For this reason he loved her more than us." And after Levi's words the Gospel of Mary ends with the statement that all the disciples began to go out in order to "proclaim and preach Jesus."

The Magdalen in the Gospel of Mary is, we see, the woman whom Jesus loved more than any other, and she is the person with whom he secretly shared his "gnosis." As Christ's partner in mystical knowledge and as the impartor of that knowledge to the disciples, the Magdalen takes on attributes of a goddess of wisdom. She is also, we see from her statement that Jesus "has prepared us and made us into men," the woman-matter become male-spirit. She is to Peter, at first, the privileged woman who can impart Jesus' wisdom to the

disciples, but she becomes an object of jealousy and of doubt. An ambivalent attitude toward woman is demonstrated both in the Magdalen's statement that she has been made man and in Peter's conflicting reactions to her.

There are other examples of this ambivalent attitude toward the Magdalen. In the Gospel of Thomas, for example, Simon Peter says, "Let Mariham go out from among us, because women are not worthy of life." And Jesus says, "See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."²³ Although this idea of woman-matter's being inferior to male-spirit is not so directly expressed in medieval plays, the notion lingers through the centuries and affects the literary figure of the Magdalen seen in the Digby play.

That the literary figure of the Magdalen embodies characteristics of the Magdalen of the Apocrypha seems to me obvious, particularly in her role as Christ's companion who dwells in the desert for thirty years to gain "spiritual strength" by forsaking material food so that her soul may, as male-spirit, ascend to her "lover" Christ.

Even though Peter's resentment of the Magdalen does not appear in the Digby play, it does show up in medieval plays contemporary with the Digby Mary Magdalene. In, for

²³Gospel of Thomas, partly quoted in NTA, I, 522.

example, a fifteenth-century German Easter play, Das Erlauer Osterspiel III,²⁴ Peter says to the Magdalen after she has told him of her having seen the risen Christ, "That rumor I will not believe. Hurry home and mind your spinning. It is a sin and a shame that females run all over the countryside." Peter doubly insults the Magdalen by using, instead of "die Frauen," the pejorative neuter "di weip."

Der red ich nicht gelauben wil!
 secz dich din haim und spinn vil!
 ez ist eine grosse schant,
 daz di weip lauffent uber lant!

(11. 1386-1389)

And Peter threatens to give her a clout on the ear, another on the cheek, and a third on the neck, for, he says, she is "ein tor," a fool.

ich gib dir mit der laffen
 ains an das ar,
 das du wüerst ein tor,
 das ander an das wang,
 mag ich dir das ander erlang,
 das dritt an den hals,

(11. 1397-1402)

The German playwright's picture of Peter's resentment of the Magdalen is, in the manner of homo ludens, playfully

²⁴Das Drama des Mittelalters, ed. Eduard Hartl (Leipzig, 1937), II, 205-260.

exaggerated; it is a medieval enlargement of the earlier picture of the male disciple resentful of the woman who is more loved by the Christ than is he. The entrance into the drama of the characteristic attributed to Peter in the apocryphal writings exemplifies the continuity of early traditions, however inexplicably they were transmitted through the centuries.

The Gospel of Mary is unique in being the only extant gospel attributed to a woman. This fact in itself points up the important place held by the Magdalen in early Christians' imaginations. And the fact that she is shown as the woman whom Jesus loved more than any other gives further evidence of early attempts to isolate her as Christ's feminine counterpart.

More attempts to isolate the Magdalen as the woman closest to Christ are evident in the Gospel of Bartholomew, Latin copies of which date, according to Montague Rhodes James in The Apocryphal New Testament (p. 166), from the ninth and eleventh centuries, and in Bartholomew's Book of the Resurrection, Latin translations of which date from the twelfth century (James, p. 186). In these works, translated in the Middle Ages, the Magdalen is, as she was in the earlier Twentieth Discourse of Cyril of Jerusalem, identified with the mother of Jesus. And indeed in Cyril's Discourse, the Magdalen, Mary Jacobi, Mary of Cleopa, and Mary the mother of Jesus are shown as one and the same person.

"The Virgin Mary," James reports (p. 87), "is represented as saying to Cyril: 'I am Mary Magdalene because the name of the village wherein I was born was Magdaleia. My name is Mary of Cleopa. I am Mary of James the son of Joseph the Carpenter.'" James says that this "reckless identification of the Virgin Mary with all the other Maries of the gospels is characteristic of these Egyptian rhapsodies" (p. 88).

The "reckless identification" of all the Marys as one person is, I think, manifestation of the desire, conscious or unconscious, to create a single feminine counterpart for the Christ. The Magadlen of the apocryphal writings, it seems to me, fills the role of the companion of the "true prophet" described in another apocryphal work, The True Prophet.²⁵

After defining the true prophet (p. 115) as "he who from the beginning of the world, changing his forms and his names, runs through universal time until, anointed for his toils by the mercy of God, he comes to his own time and will rest forever," the document describes the companion of the true prophet. "There has been created as a companion for the true prophet a female being who is as far inferior to him as metousia is to ousia [as the "particular" is to the "universal"], as the moon is to the sun, as fire is to light.

²⁵The True Prophet, partly quoted in New Testament Apocrypha, II, 115-117.

As a female she rules over the present world, which is like to her, and counts as the first prophetess; she proclaims her prophecy with all amongst those born of women" (p. 117) .

The Magdalen shown in the Gospel of Mary as the woman whom Jesus loved more than any other, as the "prophetess" proclaiming to the disciples revelations secretly given her by Jesus, is the "female being" created by early Christian writers as a companion for the "true prophet." She is considered by Peter to be as inferior to Jesus as is matter to spirit, as is the female to the male, but she has, Levi says, been made worthy by Jesus who knew her well and therefore loved her more than the male disciples.

Somehow the early view of the Magdalen as Christ's companion survives to color the literary figure seen in the fifteenth-century Digby Mary Magdalene. Beneath the Digby Magdalen, Christ's "wel-belovyd frynd" who is sent by Christ as the "holy apostylesse" to Marseilles, breathes, whether or not the Digby playwright realized it, not only the composite Magdalen of the canonical gospels but also Christ's companion of the apocryphal Gospel of Mary.

Discernible also in the Digby playwright's heroine are attributes similar to those given the Magdalen in the Pistis Sophia, for the figure in the Pistis Sophia is an expansion of the Magdalen of the Gospel of Mary. The Magdalen is again chief explicator; she is highly praised by Jesus as becoming "pure spirit," and, as in the Gospel of Mary, she is resented by Peter.

Pistis Sophia is contained in Codex Askewianus, a parchment manuscript which was, according to Hennecke and Schneemelcher, bought in a London bookshop by Dr. Anthony Askew, an antiquarian, in 1773 and purchased by the British Museum in 1785 (NTA, I, 250). How and when the manuscript reached England remains one of those mysteries that tantalize students of medieval literature.

The manuscript, composed of 174 leaves, is according to Legge, written in Coptic.²⁶ Scholars disagree on the date of the writing, with guesses from the fourth century to the ninth or tenth century (Pistis, p. ix). The first two of the six documents in the manuscript make up the Pistis Sophia and date originally, Legge believes, from the second century, not later than A.D. 170 (Pistis, p. xliv), while the remaining documents date between A.D. 245 and 388 (Pistis, p. xlviii). Legge bases his dates on the hypothesis that the documents were originally written in Greek and that the Pistis Sophia was taken from the works of Valentinus, who was eager to amalgamate elements of Persian, Buddhist, and Egyptian religions with Christianity; Legge thinks that the last four

²⁶Pistis Sophia, literally translated from the Coptic by George Horner, with an introduction by F. A. Legge (London, 1924), p. vii. At the risk of being tedious, I refer, for the purpose of this study, directly to Horner's literal translation of the Coptic manuscript into English. Besides Horner's literal translation, there are a Graeco-Latin version by Maurice George Schwartz (1853) and a German version by Carl Schmidt (1925). For discussion of translations of the translations, see Legge's introduction to Horner's Pistis Sophia.

documents were written by later Valentians (Pistis, p. xlv). The documents, at any rate, reflect the belief held by early Christians, orthodox and unorthodox, that Jesus remained on earth a dozen years after his resurrection.

All of the documents show Jesus teaching his disciples the "mysteries." Clearly evident in the mysteries are not only elements of Oriental religions but also elements of Neoplatonism and apocalyptic Judeo-Christianity, elements found in other apocryphal writings. The eclecticism evident in the teachings illustrates, as Robert M. Grant suggests in his source book of heretical writings, Gnosticism (p. 17), the cultural cross-fertilization that took place during the early centuries of Christianity. The cross-fertilization reflected in the teachings attributed to Jesus necessarily affects the figure of the Magdalen who next to Jesus figures most prominently in the Pistis Sophia. The teachings reveal dualistic ideas, similar to those suggested in the Gospel of Mary, ideas based on the view of good and evil, of spirit and matter, of light and dark, of "purity" and sexual union, of wisdom and ignorance, of life and death as contrasting absolutes.

The world is seen as evil, and as Grant points out (Gnosticism, p. 15), "only the divine spark, which is somehow imprisoned in some men, is capable of salvation." It is saved by coming to "know itself," through divine grace. In its self-knowledge the divine spark renounces the flesh,

leaves the world, in order to go into the light. To illustrate this means of salvation, Jesus narrates the story of the "fall" into darkness and matter of Pistis Sophia, of her repentance, and of Jesus' final redemption of her into the light.

The popularity of figures similar to Pistis Sophia is manifested in the figure of Helen, worshipped by the followers of so-called Simon Magus in the early centuries of Christianity, and the creation of both the Pistis Sophia and Helen further points up the desire to provide for the male deity a female partner. The female partner, Helen or Sophia, "falls" from her divine partner into prostitution and, saved by her male deity, becomes a goddess both of wisdom and of generation. The goddess is, whether she is Helen or Sophia or Athena, as Robert M. Grant points out in his provocative study Gnosticism and Early Christianity, the god's "Forethought, from which all grew and through which all exists."²⁷ She is at once Wisdom and the Mother of All.

The parallels between the composite Magdalen and Helen and Pistis Sophia are as striking as are the similarities between the Magdalen pictured in the Pistis Sophia and the heroine of the Digby play. The Magdalen of the Digby play, like the Pistis Sophia, has the "divine spark" that comes to know itself through divine grace and so renounces the

²⁷Robert M. Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity (New York and London, 2nd edition, 1966), p. 84.

world to go into the light. The medieval literary figure of the Magdalen dramatizes the fall and the means of salvation illustrated by the second-century work based on dualistic ideas as well as a statement made about her in a medieval sermon.²⁸ John Mirk says that the Magdalen gave herself all to lechery so that she even lost the name of "Mawdelen" and was called the sinful woman. But since Christ often made of the greatest sinners the most holy, Mirk says, when Christ saw "hys tyme," he gave the Magdalen "grace for to know herselfe and to have repentaunce of her mysdedys."

In the language of Neoplatonism, we can say that the literary figure of the Magdalen is the "particular" of the "universal" Pistis Sophia. The Magdalen of the Digby play falls into prostitution and is "redeemed," after warnings by the Good Angel, through her penitence, by Christ the Light. That dualistic ideas similar to those found in the Pistis Sophia contribute to the shaping of the heroine of the Digby play we can see not only in the Magdalen who forsakes prostitution for the love of the Christ but also in the woman who, "obeying her conscience," renounces material food to gain "spiritual strength" in order that her soul may unite with Christ the Light.

Immediately available to the Digby playwright was, of

²⁸Mirk's Festial, a Collection of Homilies by John Mirk, edited by Theodor Erbe (London, 1905), EETS ES 96, p. 203.

course, the ancient dualistic contrast between light and dark, for the contrast appears frequently in both the Old Testament and the New. Jesus, for example, identifies himself to the Pharisees as the light which can lead men out of darkness, in the Gospel of John 8: 12: "Again therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'"

Iterum ergo locutus est eis Jesus, dicens: Ego sum lux mundi; qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris, sed habebit lumen vitae.

Biblical sources do not, however, account directly for the extension of the dualistic view to include the distinction between light-male-spirit and dark-female-matter, a distinction drawn in the Gospel of Mary as well as in the Pistis Sophia and in other apocryphal works, a distinction surviving to color the picture of the Magdalen seen in the fifteenth-century Digby play.

The Magdalen in the Pistis Sophia is vividly shown as the one whom Jesus "will complete in all the mysteries of the things of the Height" (Pistis, p. 13), and Jesus is represented as the Light of Lights whose "vesture of light" at first fills his disciples with fear (Pistis, p. 3). Jesus first tells his disciples of his having come, at the command of the "First Mystery," into the world of mankind where he, in the form of Gabriel, found "Maria whom they

are wont to call my mother" and "cast powers of Light rulers on her" (Pistis, p. 7).

And "Mariham having heard these words, saying them the Savior, she gazed in the air for the space of an hour" (Pistis, p. 13). The Magdalen, "Mariham," the first to speak after Jesus has spoken, asks her "Lord" to allow her to speak with boldness, and Jesus answers, "Mariham, Mariham the happy, whom I shall complete in all the mysteries of the things of the Height. Speak in boldness, because thou art she whose heart straineth toward the Kingdom of the heavens more than all thy brothers" (Pistis, p. 13).

The Magdalen then explains at length the words of Jesus. And Jesus praises her: "Well done, Maria, because thou art happy beyond every woman who is upon earth, because thou art she who will become the Pleroma of all the Pleromas and the completion of all the completions" (Pistis, p. 14), the fullness of all divine powers. The Magdalen, "glad greatly," worships at Jesus' feet and questions him further, and Jesus tells her that he will reveal to her everything which she seeks.

After Jesus discourses on Places, Rulers, Spheres, Aeons, Destinies, again Mary, "she who is beautiful in her speaking, and the happy one," questions Jesus concerning the purification of souls outside their "Places," and Jesus praises her for "enquiring aright and giving light upon everything in accuracy and exactness" (Pistis, p. 17).

The Magdalen continues to "enquire aright" as Jesus speaks of the Rulers of the Light and narrates the "fall" of Pistis Sophia from the Light into the darkness of the thirteenth Aeon, of her forsaking the "mystery" of the thirteenth Aeon and hymning the "Light which is at the Height" where she desired to go (Pistis, p. 22).

All the rulers of the twelve Aeons hated her because she wanted to go above them into the Light, Jesus says, and the triple power Self-willed in the thirteenth Aeon "lusted" for her and surrounded her with his "material emanations," who "afflicted her" and took away her light (Pistis, p. 24). Pistis Sophia, in her darkness, cried out greatly and said a "Repentance" to the Light of Lights. "Deliver me, O Light, because evil thoughts came unto me" (Pistis, p. 24), Pistis Sophia cries, and she recounts her "transgressions," her fall into the "darkness of the chaos." She did "these things" in her innocence, she says, mistaking the light of the triple power Self-willed for the Light of the Lights, and she begs to be delivered from the "matter of this darkness" (Pistis, p. 25).

"I looked out for my partner," she calls to the Light, "that he should come and fight for me, and he came not. And I was looking that he should come and give power to me, and I did not find him. And (I) having sought after the light, they gave to me darkness, and (I) having sought after my power, they gave to me the matter," and Pistis Sophia

begs the Light to wreak vengeance on them (Pistis, pp. 25-26). Jesus quotes in full Sophia's long repentance, which draws material from the Song of Songs and from David's Psalms and which is filled with dualistic contrasts of dark with light, matter with soul, mysteries of sexual union with mysteries of spiritual union. And the Magdalen "comes forward again" to explicate Sophia's repentance, for, she says, "my companion of light hath ear and I hear in my power of light and was wakeful the spirit which is with me" (Pistis, p. 27). As she concludes her lengthy explication, Jesus again praises her, "Well done, Mariham the happy, the all-blessed of the Pleroma, this woman whom they will call happy in every generation" (Pistis, p. 28).

When Jesus finishes quoting Pistis Sophia's second repentance, Peter springs up and, with the same attitude toward the Magdalen as that seen in the Gospel of Mary and in other apocryphal writings as well as in the fifteenth-century German Easter play, says, "Lord, we are not able to bear with this woman, saying instead of us; and she letting not any of us speak, but she is speaking many times" (Pistis, p. 29). Peter is then permitted to explain Pistis Sophia's second repentance, and Jesus, saying "Well done, Peter," tells the third repentance, which Martha, "in humility," explains (Pistis, p. 31). The pattern continues throughout the twelve repentances of Pistis Sophia, with "John the Virgin," Philip, Andrew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Salome, Mary the mother of

Jesus, and the Magdalen taking turns to explain the repentances.

Jesus tells of Pistis Sophia's crying out to him from the thirteenth Aeon, "O Light of Lights," and asking for forgiveness. "I forsook the Place of the Height and dwelt in the Place of the Chaos," she said (Pistis, p. 54). Jesus explains that he purged all matter from Pistis Sophia, saved her with a crown of light for her head, and her crown of light united with his (Pistis, p. 57).

The Magdalen explicates Jesus' saving the Pistis Sophia through an elaborate discussion of the "Powers" of David's Psalm 84: 11 (Authorized Version: 85:10). The "Powers" that she describes are "Mercy" and "Truth" who "met one another" (Pistis, p. 58), and "Righteousness" and "Peace" who "kissed one another." As she concludes, Jesus again praises "Mariham the happy, this one who will inherit all the kingdom of the Light" (Pistis, p. 59).

Mary the mother of Jesus offers an explanation of the four "Powers" by telling an episode in which Jesus, "being yet little," was in the vineyard with Joseph when the "Spirit" came to her seeking Jesus and she, thinking it a "phantasm" come to tempt her, bound the Spirit "unto the foot" of her "place of lying" while she ran to the vineyard to tell Joseph of the intruder (Pistis, p. 59). But Jesus heard her words and understood and ran to the Spirit, which was like to him, and embraced and kissed the Spirit and they "became only one"

(Pistis, p. 60). Jesus says to his mother, "Well done," and the Magdalen immediately explains further the meanings of the four "Powers," and Jesus praises her, "the inheritor of the Light" (Pistis, p. 61). Once more Mary the mother of Jesus comes forward and, kissing her son's feet and asking him not to be angry with her, explains the words yet another time (Pistis, p. 61).

Costumed in medieval "mantelys" and speaking English rather than Coptic, David's "Powers" figure in fifteenth-century plays. In, for example, The Castle of Perseverence Mercy, Truth, Righteousness, and Peace, so elaborately explicated by the Magdalen and Mary the mother of Jesus in the second-century Pistis Sophia, walk onto the medieval English stage as the "Four Daughters of God," concerned with saving "Mankind."²⁹

After Jesus quotes more of Pistis Sophia's hymns to the Light of Lights, with others giving explanations, the Magdalen comes forward and says, "My Lord, my mind intelligent is at every time, for me to come forward at every moment and utter the explanation of the words which she (Pistis Sophia) said. But I am fearing Peter, because he is wont to threaten me, and he hateth our sex" (Pistis, p. 80). Obviously, the Magdalen of the second-century Pistis Sophia

²⁹The Castle of Perseverence, in Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Cambridge, Mass., 1924), pp. 264-287. For the part played by the Four Daughters of God in The Castle, see 11. 3130-3650.

is referring to the same Peter who, in the fifteenth-century Erlauer Osterspiel III, threatens to give her a clout on the ear, another on the cheek, and a third on the neck, and who complains about the "females" that run all over the countryside.

When Jesus tells the Magdalen that no one can keep anyone filled with the spirit from answering, she explicates another of Pistis Sophia's hymns (Pistis, p. 81). "Maria, the Magdalene," later explains the meaning of seeking everything in an exactness (Pistis, p. 91), and Jesus praises her for seeking after a manner "in which it is worthy to seek." He will, he says, reveal all to her in "joy" (Pistis, p. 92). The Magdalen rejoices and asks further questions concerning the mysteries. Jesus explains and tells her that he will complete her with "every Pleroma," with "every Power" (Pistis, p. 92).

When "Maria the Magdalene" again sprang up and explained the "mystery of the Light" (Pistis, p. 98), "the Savior wondered greatly at the assertion of the words which she saith, because she had become spirit quite pure" (Pistis, p. 99). Jesus says to her, "Well done, O pure spiritual Maria, this is the explanation of the word." And the Magdalen tells Jesus of the need to deliver all men from "Darkness," for, she says, "not only are we compassionate of ourselves but we are compassionate of all the race of mankind," and Jesus feels great "mercy" for her, and she, rejoicing in "great joy,"

asks more questions concerning the mysteries of the Light and of the Ineffable (Pistis, p. 100).

Jesus' explication of the mystery of the Ineffable combines elements of Neoplatonism and Eastern mystery religions in a long catalogue of opposites, and when Jesus concludes, the Magdalen worships at his feet and, weeping, cries out that her brothers did not understand his words (Pistis, p. 109). Jesus himself is, he concludes, that Mystery (Pistis, p. 116). Jesus, impatient with Andrew who remains "without knowledge," chides him (Pistis, p. 124) and says that he came to purify men of their matter, and once more he urges the disciples to renounce the world with its matter, to seek and find the mysteries of purification (Pistis, p. 125). Jesus then, at the disciples' request, forgives Andrew the "sin" of his ignorance (Pistis, p. 126).

In the third document, a part of the Books of the Savior, Jesus explains the "mysteries" of restoring the dead to life, of healing the sick, of curing men of demons, and warns the disciples not to give the knowledge of these mysteries to anyone else (Pistis, p. 141). With Egyptian magic, beliefs in Fate, and allegorical exegesis dominating the discourse, Jesus and the Magdalen discuss the types of sinners and punishments inflicted on them by the "dragon of outer darkness" (Pistis, pp. 160-164), the nature of Fate (Pistis, pp. 169-176), the mysteries of salvation (Pistis, pp. 177-178). The Magdalen is praised for her exegesis with "the four

meanings" of the ways of saving the soul from the "Counterfeit Spirit" which is compelled to sin by Fate (Pistis, pp. 148-149).

When the Magdalen springs up to explain Jesus' words during the discussion, Jesus addresses her as "O spiritual one of pure light" (Pistis, p. 151, p. 153). The document closes with Jesus telling her that he "despoiled" himself to bring the mysteries to purify men (Pistis, p. 178) and the Magdalen telling Jesus that she and the disciples are "happy beyond every man for these greatnesses which thou hast revealed to us" (Pistis, p. 179).

The important role given the Magdalen in the apocryphal works is again manifested in the last two documents of the manuscript, both documents also fragments of the Books of the Savior. The fragments further exemplify attempts to incorporate old religions into the new by mingling magic and astrology with Christianity. Jesus' opening prayer to the "Fatherhood of every fatherhood, the boundless Light" is a mixture of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Persian words (Pistis, p. 180).

Jesus not only further emphasizes the necessity to forsake the mysteries of sexual intercourse for the mysteries of union with the Light but also tells a story of "Sabaoth indeed the Adamas" who, with his rulers, remained "working in the intercourse" and therefore caused the "Father of my Father" to bind them into a "sphere" and put "Rulers over

them" (Pistis, p. 181). The rulers men call Kronos, Ares, the Hermes, the Aphrodite, the Zeus. Jesus says that Ieou bound in the Aphrodite a "Power" which he drew out of the Pistis Sophia (Pistis, p. 182).

As Jesus tells these things, the Magdalen kisses Jesus' hands and, weeping, asks him to reveal to her and the disciples ways to escape "great punishments" on the roads of the "Middle" so that they will not be cut away from Jesus (Pistis, pp. 182-183). Jesus has compassion and tells her that he will reveal every mystery to "my brothers and my beloved" (Pistis, p. 183). Jesus proceeds to describe the rulers of the Middle, who destroy souls by their "evil fire" (Pistis, p. 184). The rulers include the "Paraplex" in the shape of a woman, with hair reaching down to its feet (Pistis, p. 183); the "Ethiopian woman, quite black" (Pistis, p. 185); and Hecate of the three faces (Pistis, p. 186), along with others. Under the rule of these figures are demons who cause men to lie, curse, kill, lust, wrong the righteous, forget the poor, fornicate, commit adultery, and "do intercourse continually" (Pistis, p. 186).

After Jesus' description of these rulers of the "Middle" the disciples beg compassion for themselves and for all the race of mankind, and Jesus tells them not to fear because he will make the disciples lords over all men (Pistis, p. 188). He hymns in the "great name," blesses them, breathes into their eyes, shows them a great light, and performs a

magic rite with fire and vine wood, a cup of water, two jars of wine, and cakes (Pistis, pp. 188-189). He tells them to "hide the mystery" and says that the "Name" in which is every name is the great mystery and when it is spoken it will dissolve all evil powers (Pistis, pp. 191-192).

The efforts in this fragment to mingle old mysteries and magic with the new religion and to incorporate into Christianity old religious figures, even though the figures become tempters, give further evidence of the power held on imaginations by the desire for continuity. And the blending of Pistis Sophia with Aphrodite, along with the emphasis on the necessity to forsake the "mysteries of the intercourse," gives further evidence of the paradoxical preoccupation with and fear of sexual intercourse, of the conflict which comes from the dualistic view of matter as female and evil and of spirit as male and good. Again, too, in this apocryphal work, the Magdalen's closeness to the Christ is clearly shown.

In the other fragment of the Books of the Savior, the Magdalen, "Mariham," opens the dialogue with a question concerning the punishments of slanderers (Pistis, p. 193), but soon Peter asks Jesus to "let the women be content unto seeking, that we may also seek" (Pistis, p. 195). Jesus then tells "Mariham and the women" to let the males also ask. The males ask Jesus about punishments of robbers, of the proud, of blasphemers, of "man who sleeps with man," and of an "Esau and Jacob" mystery involving the eating of a soup

containing sperm mingled with menstrual blood (Pistis, pp. 195-197). Jesus says that the last sin is the greatest of sins and describes the punishments which will be administered by demons to the sinners. The Magdalen asks a final question concerning the "sinful man who discovers no mystery" (Pistis, p. 198), and Jesus says that sinner will receive all punishments at once. The disciples beg Jesus to have mercy on them and save them from these punishments (Pistis, p. 199).

The Books of the Savior and the Pistis Sophia show, then, man's concern with the problems of evil and of mortality and his attempt to resolve the problems through the dualistic view which sees matter as dark, feminine, and evil in conflict with spirit seen as light, male, and good. To achieve the good and immortality, the story of the fall and redemption of Pistis Sophia demonstrates, the "divine spark" must come to know itself and forsake the mysteries of sexual intercourse for the mysteries of union with the deity.

In the apocrypha's emphasis on the necessity to forsake the mysteries of sexual intercourse is implicit, if indeed not explicit, the continuation into at least the second century of Christianity of ancient fertility rites described by Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough (one-volume edition, p. 384 ff.) as "sanctified harlotry" devoted to the "great Mother Goddess of Western Asia, whose name varied, while her type remained constant, from place to place." Pistis Sophia

ambiguously represents a Mother Goddess, "consort" of Jesus, and in her "fall" the evil of "matter." Pistis Sophia is specifically named the "consort of the Savior" in two apocryphal works, the Epistle of Eugnostos and Sophia Jesu Christi, as Carl Schmidt illustrates in his introduction to Pistis Sophia. "The Son of Man agreed with Sophia, his consort, and revealed himself in a (great light) as bisexual. His male nature is called 'the Savior, the begetter of all things,' but his female 'Sophia, mother of all,' whom some call Pistis."³⁰

The writers of the apocrypha have, then, preserved in the figure of Pistis Sophia memories both of the rites of "sanctified harlotry" and of the great Mother Goddesses to whom the rites were dedicated, and the Digby playwright has also preserved in the literary figure of the Magdalen of the fifteenth century echoes both of the fertility rites of "sanctified harlotry" and of a Mother Goddess to whom the rites were dedicated. Obvious attributes of a Mother Goddess are evident in the Digby play's heroine who not only restores the queen of Marseilles to life on the "rock of ston" but who, more importantly, brings about the queen's conception of a child.

Much like the Pistis Sophia, the heroine of the Digby play "falls" into prostitution and afterwards forsakes her

³⁰Carl Schmidt, Pistis Sophia (Leipzig, 1925), p. xxi ff. Quoted in NTA, I, 251.

worldly "valentyne" whom she loved to "hals and kysse" to become Christ's spiritual lover, her soul joyfully united with the Christ in heaven. The converted Magdalen of the Digby play, like the Pistis Sophia, speaks a "repentance" and says a prayer to Christ the Light who delivers men from darkness. And like the "wise" Magdalen of the Pistis Sophia, the Digby heroine evokes from the risen Christ the explication of his role as a gardener and recounts to the king of Marseilles the creation of the world. A "power" of the Pistis Sophia, whose ancestors must have included, along with Wisdom of the Old Testament, an Athene, is evident both in the Magdalen of the fifteenth-century Digby play and in Christ's "beloved" of the second-century Pistis Sophia.

The Magdalen's strong and enduring appeal to imaginations manifests itself in myths shaped around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels during the early centuries of Christianity as well as in the Digby playwright's placing her in the role of heroine of his fifteenth-century Mary Magdalene. Both the shapers of the mythical Magdalen and the Digby playwright are, I think homo ludens working on the borderline between jest and earnest. Through their eclectic imaginations, the writers of the apocrypha create a companion for the "True Prophet," a "female being" who, as we have seen in the apocryphal work The True Prophet, rules over the present world, "which is like to her," and through his eclectic imagination, the

Digby playwright re-creates, in "game and glee," the Magdalen as the Christ's companion.

The Magdalen who appears in the Gospel of John as the woman who, lamenting the dead Christ, seeks him, and finding him resurrected, rejoices, is, as we have seen, early identified with the prostitute who is the anointer of the Christ, and she is therefore identified with Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus and so becomes not only the sister of Martha and Lazarus but also the one anointer of the Christ. In roles given her by the writers of the apocrypha we have seen further augmentation of her closeness to the Christ. She is, in the Gospel of Mary, in the Pistis Sophia, and in the fragments from the Books of the Savior, Christ's companion, his "beloved" whom Peter resents, the "pure spiritual one" who understands the words of Jesus and explicates them with an exactness, the one who will inherit the light, Christ's feminine counterpart, the Christian goddess of wisdom.

The Magdalen, sister of Martha and of Lazarus, prostitute, Christ's anointer, Christ's companion, grows in complexity as myths accumulate around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels. The composite Magdalen becomes a controversial figure amongst early Church Fathers, and it is not until the end of the sixth century, with Pope Gregory's approval, as Victor Saxer points out (Le Culte, p. 3), that the Magdalen as a prostitute, the anointer of Christ, the sister of Martha and Lazarus is accepted as the

same woman to whom the risen Christ first appeared, and then only in the Western Church, where in the sixteenth century the composite figure again becomes a subject of debate among theologians.

Both the Magdalen of the Gospel of John and the anointers of Christ do, however, inspire Church Fathers during the early centuries of Christianity to interpret them symbolically and to place them in theology. Although the Church Fathers' interpretations do not altogether account for the literary figure of the Magdalen, they do affect the Digby playwright's picture of his heroine. To deepen understanding of the literary figure, we examine one of the most important early interpretations of the anointers of Christ, that of Origen in his commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs, and we look at an early interpretation of the Magdalen of the Gospel of John, that of Hippolytus, for the interpretations of these third-century writers live on into the Middle Ages to color the literary figure of the Magdalen.

CHAPTER IV

ATTRIBUTES OF THE MAGDALEN DERIVED FROM WRITINGS OF HIPPOLYTUS AND ORIGEN

Just as the writers of the apocrypha tried to incorporate elements of older religions into Christianity, so the early Church Fathers set out to demonstrate that the New Testament was a fulfillment of the Old Testament. They saw Old Testament figures as foreshadowings of New Testament figures, and they saw the Magdalen, among other fulfillments of Old Testament figures, as a second Eve. As Damien Vorreux points out in Sainte Marie-Madeleine, quelle est donc cette femme?, Hippolytus, along with others, saw the Magdalen of John's gospel finding Jesus, the tree of life, in the garden as a fulfillment of Eve separated from the tree of life in the garden of Eden.³¹ The conception of the Magdalen as a second Eve survives, with all its ambiguous implications, into the Middle Ages to affect the literary figure of the Magdalen both in iconography and in literature. It is, for example, no mere chance that the Digby playwright's hercine, as the first Eve, waits for her lover in an arbor and, as the second Eve, finds the risen Christ in the garden.

³¹Damien Vorreux, Sainte Marie-Madeleine, quelle est donc cette femme? (Paris, 1963), p. 20.

Another very important influence not only on the literary figure but also on the Mary Magdalene honored in the medieval Roman Catholic Church is the identification of Christ's anointers with the Bride of the Song of Songs. The identification, made by several early Church Fathers, is most strikingly interpreted by Origen in his third-century Commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs.

Although Origen, in the tradition of the Eastern Church, does not identify as one person the Magdalen, Mary of Bethany, and the "sinner" anointer of the Christ, many Western Church Fathers do attribute to the composite Magdalen Origen's interpretations of the anointers of the Christ. The Magdalen's festival day is, as the Roman missal demonstrates, celebrated, when it is celebrated, with a part of the Song of Songs:

Surgam, et circuibo civitatem; per vicos et plateas quaeram quem diligit anima mea; quaesivi illum, et non inveni. Invenerunt me vigiles qui custodiunt civitatem: Num quem diligit anima mea vidistis? Paululum cum pertransissem eos, inveni quem diligit anima mea, tenui eum, nec dimittam, donec introducarn illum in domum matris meae, et in cubiculum genitricis meae. Adjuro vos, filiae Jerusalem, per capreas cervosque camporum, ne suscitatis, neque evigilare faciatis dilectam, donec ipsa velit.

(Song of Songs 3: 2-5)

(I shall rise now, and go about the city, through the cross-roads and the streets I will seek him whom my soul loves; I looked for him, and I did not find him. The watchmen who guard the city encountered me: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? A little while after I went from them I found him whom my soul loves, I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the bedroom of her who conceived me. I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the hinds of the field, that you neither awaken nor arouse love until he wishes.)

Also for the Magdalen's day are two verses from Song of Songs 8:

Pone me ut signaculum super cor tuum, ut
 signaculum super brachium tuum, quia fortis
 est ut mors dilectio, dura sicut infernus
 aemulatio: lampades ejus lampades ignis
 atque flammarum. Aquae multae non potuerunt
 extinguere charitatem, nec flamina obruent
 illam. Si dederit homo omnem substantiam
 domus suae pro dilectione, quasi nihil
 despiciet eam.

(Song of Songs 8: 6-7)

(Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as painful as the inferno, its torches, torches of fire and blazing flames. Many waters cannot extinguish devotion, nor rivers destroy

it. Were man to give all his household goods for love, he would be looked down on as nothing.)

The parallel between the Magdalen of John's gospel shown seeking the Christ and finding him and the lover of the Song of Songs seeking her beloved and finding him is, of course, obvious, but the total effect of the Song of Songs on the literary figure of the Magdalen is, I think, less obvious and more profound. However interpreted, the Song of Songs connotes, as it denotes, eroticism, an unashamed eroticism, an eroticism frowned on by Judeo-Christianity but still retaining a powerful hold on imaginations of Jews and Christians alike. And the Magdalen's appeal to imaginations stems, at least in part, from a power similar to that of the Song of Songs.

Only fragments of Origen's Commentary on the Song of Songs, and no parts of the Homilies, survive in the original Greek. A large part, however, of the Commentary translated into Latin in the fifth century by Rufinus and the two Homilies translated into Latin by Jerome in the fourth century make clear Origen's method of interpretation of the Song of Songs.³² The method, patterned after Rabbinical exegesis of the Song of Songs, is based on the idea that layers of meaning are hidden beneath the surface meaning of words or figures

³²Rufinus' and Jerome's translations, as well as the few Greek fragments of Origen's Commentary, are in Migne, PG XIII, cols. 35-216. I refer, in this study, to R. P. Lawson's nicely translated and well annotated Origen, the Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies (London, 1957).

or events, a method familiar to all students of medieval literature and commonly called the allegorical method. The use of the three-fold method of interpretation reflects, as Lawson points out (Origen, p. 9), application of the Platonic idea of the tripartite man, "body-soul-spirit," to the interpretation of the written word.³³ Origen tries at once to reveal the layers of meaning, the soul and the spirit, beneath the body of the "letter" of the Song of Songs, and to incorporate the old Song into Christianity.

Origen sees the Bride of the Song of Songs, as Lawson observes (Origen, pp. 13-14), as the "pre-existent Church," present from all time, which comes "up from the steppe of Paganism to receive her Bridegroom and the living water that is to turn her arid lands into the fruitful paradise of the second Adam and the second Eve; and to her is given the mission of becoming the Mother of God's people resurrected to new life through Baptism."

In his Commentary, Origen defines the Song of Songs as an epithalamium, but it is, he says, a "drama of mystical meaning" (Origen, p. 21), and he urges that no one not free of "passion" read the Song of Songs (Origen, p. 23), for it will lead any man who "lives only after the flesh" to "fleshly lust" (p. 22). "Mortify your carnal senses," he

³³Professor Arnold Williams reminds me of the fact that Origen has a four-fold interpretation as well as a three-fold interpretation, and Professor Williams suggests that the four-fold interpretation would probably be flesh-body-spirit-soul.

begs his audience (p. 79). Origen insists that there is nothing "carnal" in the Song (p. 53), for Solomon, whom Origen identifies as the Bridegroom, is a "type" of Christ (p. 51), and his Bride, the Queen of Sheba, is simultaneously Mary, Christ's anointer (p. 160), the Church (p. 21), the soul (p. 21), and the "daughter of the mother of us all," Jerusalem, who had to be purified of false teachings that she had learned living among the heathen (p. 114).

The scripture, Origen says, uses names applicable to the "outer man" for the "inner man" (p. 28), and just as illicit love may happen to the outer man so that he loves a harlot or an adulteress so it may happen to the inner man (p. 30). Origen distinguishes Eros, carnal love, from Christ, spiritual love, but says that both Christ and Eros throw the dart which gives the "wound of love" (p. 29), Christ in the spirit, Eros in the flesh. Darts from unseen demons bring men to fornication, greed, and other sins (p. 199), but the "sweet dart of Christ's knowledge" makes the "smitten" one burn with love for the Word, gives "health-bestowing" wounds (p. 198).

Although one may speak of having a passion for God, Origen says (p. 35), the love that exists in one who loves God is "charity," which is God, and charity, "in whomsoever it exists loves nothing earthly, nothing material, nothing corruptible since it is the "fount of incorruption" (p. 33). The soul has inner senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing,

which Christ satisfies (p. 164). When the Bride longs for the kisses of her lover, the Church-Soul-Mary (of Bethany) longs for the holy mysteries of the Church, the Word of God (p. 60). As Origen comments on the Bride longing for the Bridegroom, who must now and then leave her, he identifies himself with the Bride and says that he too longs for the Bridegroom (p. 280).

The soul must, Origen says, "know itself" and follow sacred, not worldly, pursuits (p. 139). The "cosmetics" of the soul is the "oil" which is "joy" (p. 73), or it is Christ, the ointment "which makes those who are anointed by it to be Christs themselves" (p. 162). Origen explicates the Bride who anoints the Bridegroom as both the Church and the Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes them with her hair (p. 160), so that the whole Soul-Church is filled with the fragrance of the Holy Spirit (p. 161).

Mary, the sister of Martha, is identified with one of Solomon's "blessed" women who figures as "partakers of the Word," for she sat at Jesus' feet, hearing him, and was told by Jesus himself that she had chosen the better part (p. 101). The literary figure of the Magdalen, we recall, takes on this attribute of the "partaker of the Word," of the "contemplatyff" who, in the Digby play, becomes a hermit to gain "spiritual strength," and the religious figure of the Magdalen becomes the patron saint of mystics during the Middle Ages.

Although Origen reflects a dualistic view of matter and spirit, he does not, as do many of the writers of the apocrypha, identify matter with the female and spirit with the male. On the contrary, Origen tells men to love their mothers, their sisters, and their wives "in a special way," and to love every woman "in all purity," according to her merits (p. 191). Charity, unselfish love, Origen teaches, reckons all men as neighbors (p. 33). Origen further emphasizes love in his homilies on the Song of Songs.

In the second homily he says that one of the emotions of the soul is love, and "we use love well if its objects are wisdom and truth," but when "love descends to baser levels, then we love flesh and blood" (p. 284). Origen again contrasts the "fleshly wound" with the "spiritual wound" of love. "How beautiful, how fitting it is to receive a wound from Love! One person receives the dart of fleshly love, another is wounded by earthly desire; but do you lay bare your members and offer yourself to the chosen dart, the lovely dart; for God is the archer indeed" (p. 297).³⁴

³⁴Origen's interpretation of Christ as the "archer," the Christian Eros, lives on to appear in a liturgical hymn to be sung on July 22 in honor of the Magdalen. The Magdalen, in a hymn by Saint Roberto Francesco Bellarmino (1542-1621), is described as "wounded by love" of Christ, "Father of heavenly light," who with a glance lit a fire of love in her and thawed the ice of her heart, so that she ran to anoint Christ's blessed feet."

Pater superni luminis,
Cum Magdalenam respicis,
Flammas amoris excitas
Geluque solvis pectoris

Jesus is, in Origen's second homily, identified as the "son of our sister, the Synagogue," and as "the husband of the Church" (p. 287), and in both homilies Origen identifies Christ's anointers as the fulfillment of the "type" of the Bride (p. 285 and p. 273). The Bride, who is black, is, Origen says, becoming white; he urges his congregation to "practice penitence too" so that they may have "white souls" (p. 276). "The breasts of the chaste are not bruised," Origen emphasizes, "but the paps of harlots are wrinkled with folds of loose skin. The breasts of the chaste are firm and round and rosy with virginity. Such receive the Bridegroom-Word" (p. 288).

Origen, we see, in his explication of the "mystical meaning" of the Song of Songs, identifies Christ's anointers with the Bride of the Song, and although Origen does not see the anointers as the Magdalen, Western Church Fathers, accepting the popular identifications of the Magdalen with both the prostitute and the Mary who anointed Jesus, as well as with the sister of Martha and Lazarus, see the Magdalen as the Bride of the Song of Songs, Christ's sister-bride, "soror mea sponsa." The identification of the Magdalen as Christ's bride lives on both in the Mary Magdalene honored by the Roman Catholic Church and in the literary figure of the Digby play. Raymond-Leopold Bruckberger, for example,

Amore currit saucia
Pedes beatos ungere,...

The hymn is printed in Hymns of the Roman Liturgy, ed. Joseph Connelly (Westminster, Maryland, 1954), p. 214.

subscribes his twentieth-century "biography" of the Magdalen "soror mea sponsa."³⁵

And just as Origen could not avoid the use of erotic language in his exegesis of the Song of Songs so Bruckberger could not avoid the use of erotic language in his "life" of the beautiful courtesan who becomes Christ's lover. Nor could the Digby playwright any more escape the use of erotic language in his picture of the Magdalen as the Christ's lover than in his picture of her as a "worldly" lover.

Although Origen emphasizes the Judeo-Christian ethic of charity, of love of man for his fellowman, he is not remembered through the centuries for his teaching that charity reckons all men neighbors; he is, instead, remembered for his "mystical" identification of Christ with the Bridegroom, the spiritual Eros, and of the Church-Mary-Soul with the Bride of the Song of Songs.

"In all allegory there is," Henry Osborn Taylor points out in The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages, "mystery, and in all allegory mysticism, with its inherent spirit of contradiction and paradox, is implicit."³⁶ The spirit of contradiction and paradox implicit in Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs shows up in Origen's failure to escape

³⁵Raymond-Leopold Bruckberger, Marie Madeleine, soror mea sponsa (Paris, 1952).

³⁶Henry Osborn Taylor, The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages (originally published, 1901; Harper Torchbook, New York, 1963), p. 102.

the use of erotic language and images in his attempt to parallel the sensuous love of the Bride and her Beloved with the love of the Church-Mary-Soul and the Christ. And the paradox, an erotic asceticism, inherent in mysticism, lives in the iconographic and literary figure of the Magdalen.

The sensuality, the frank eroticism expressed and indeed celebrated in the Song of Songs no mystical, symbolical, or Neoplatonic interpretation can completely hide. Nor can Rabbinical and Christian allegorical exegesis as a means of incorporating the old love song into Judeo-Christianity hide the reality of the ancient song's magic appeal to desires deep in humanity.

The spell cast by the Song of Songs on Jews and Christians alike springs, I think, not from mystical interpretations of the "hidden meanings" of the Song but rather from the Song's own religious and universal power. Its universal power is evident in the fact that, according to Theophile James Meek, there are Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek parallels to the Song of Songs,³⁷ besides, as Franklin Edgerton shows, a Hindu parallel.³⁸ The religious power of the Song of Songs

³⁷Theophile James Meek, "The Song of Songs and the Fertility Cult," in Song of Songs, a symposium by Max Leopold Margolis and others, ed. Wilfred Harvey Schoff (Philadelphia, 1924), chap. V, p. 69.

³⁸Franklin Edgerton, "The Hindu Song of Songs," Song of Songs, chap. IV.

grows out of its transcendence of the fear of death through the celebration of life.

"In pre-modern societies," Mircea Eliade points out in Rites and Symbols of Initiation, the Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth, "sexuality, like all the other functions of life, is fraught with sacredness. It is a way of participating in the fundamental mystery of life and fertility."³⁹ The continuity of life on earth is evoked by the dramatized sexual union of man with woman. Meek argues convincingly that the Song of Songs originally represented the ritual wooing and marriage of a god and goddess for the revival of life in the world. The goddess, Mother Earth, whatever her name, languishes for the heaven god (Meek, p. 60), searches for him, finds him, and unites with him (Meek, p. 62) and so revives the fertility of the gardens, of the vineyards, of the flocks, of humanity. The ancient concept of nature's seasonal death followed by joyous rebirth is transformed by Judeo-Christian thought to become a part, according to Meek (p. 49), of the liturgies during Passover and Easter.

In the heart of the old fertility song, the Bride searching for and finding the Bridegroom, sounds an echo of the lamentation and joy expressed by Isis as she searches for her brother-husband Osiris. Isis says, in part:

³⁹Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, the Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth (Published in 1958 under the title Birth and Rebirth; Harper Torchbook, 1965), trans. from French by Willard R. Trask, p. 25.

O Beautiful Boy, come to thy house,
 immediately, immediately. I do not
 see thee, my heart weepeth for thee,
 my two eyes follow thee about. I am
 following thee about so that I may see thee,
 I wait to see thee, Beautiful Prince, lo,
 I wait to see thee; O An, it is good to see thee.
 Come to thy beloved one, Beautiful Being triumphant!
 Come to thy sister. Come to thy wife.⁴⁰

It is the heart of the Song of Songs which, as we have seen, centers the Magdalen's festival day. And the Magdalen's day was in several places during the Middle Ages, according to Victor Saxer (Le Culte, p. 34), celebrated during Easter, coinciding with the Spring Equinox; on March 28 was held the "feast of her conversion."

"It may be a far cry," Wilfred Schoff says, "from an Oriental Goddess of Love with her many names, Ishtar, Shulmanitu, Aphrodite, Venus, to the Daughter of Jerusalem, the Bride of Yahweh, the Holy Catholic Church," and Schoff adds that it is also a far cry from Tammuz or Adonis to Yahweh or the Christ but that the "connection of both with the original types is unbroken and unmistakable."⁴¹ The

⁴⁰Part of the lamentation of Isis from the "Mystery of Osiris at Abydos," trans. by E. A. Wallis Budge in his Osiris (London, 1911; new edition, New York, 1961), II, 60-61.

⁴¹Wilfred Schoff, "The Offering Lists in the Song of Songs and Their Political Significance," Song of Songs, chap VI, pp. 106-107.

connection of the Magdalen with a goddess of love is also unbroken and unmistakable, for when Origen connected Christ's anointers with the Bride of the Song of Songs he, though quite unintentionally, contributed to the linking of the composite Magdalen, to be celebrated in the Middle Ages, with an ancient fertility goddess.

Origen's interpretations of Mary the sister of Martha as the "partaker of the Word," and of the beautiful Ethiopian Bride becoming "white" through penitence also survive in later theologians' interpretations of the Magdalen, and these interpretations are represented in the medieval literary figure. But the Magdalen becomes and remains a literary figure, in large part, because she is linked in writers' imaginations with an ancient goddess, a goddess both of love and of wisdom.

The great goddess of ancient religions, as Erich Neumann points out in his study of the archetype The Great Mother, "in the patriarchal development of the Judeo-Christian West, with its masculine, monotheistic trend toward abstraction" was "disenthroned" and "repressed."⁴² Neumann adds that the goddess did, however, survive in Christianity through underground doctrines. Certainly the great goddess, with all her ambiguity, lives in the mythical Magdalen created around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels.

⁴²Erich Neumann, The Great Mother, an analysis of the archetype, trans. from the German by Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XLVII (2nd edition, New York, 1963), p. 331.

The goddess survives in the literary figure of the Digby play as a seductive goddess of love, as a goddess of wisdom, as a protective goddess of life. And it is, I think, as a goddess of life on this earth that the Digby heroine kisses this earth "fervently" as she dies.

Although the survival into the Middle Ages of the Magdalen to whom early Christian imaginations gave attributes of ancient goddesses cannot be altogether traced, it may in part be accounted for by the survival in the human imagination of ancient gods and goddesses themselves. Coinciding in time with the survival of the ancient deities is, we know, the continuing life of the composite Magdalen in sermons of Western Church Fathers who, through the centuries, use her as an example of the Christian penitent, the recipient of Christ's love and mercy, the first person to whom the risen Christ appears, a second Eve, the contemplative soul, the apostle to the apostles, the Church itself, Christ's sister-bride.

The ways in which the ancient deities survived throughout the Middle Ages have been treated by Jean Seznec in The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The gods survived, according to Seznec (p. 11), through the use from the early Christian period into the Middle Ages of Euhemerism.⁴³ Euhemerus, in the third century B.C., set forth the idea that gods were

⁴³Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, the Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, trans. from the French by Barbara F. Sessions, Bollingen Series XXXVIII (New York, 1953).

recruited from mortal men, and the idea was used by early Christian writers, including Augustine, as a weapon against Paganism (Seznec, p. 13). The gods were, however, also placed in world history where they remained to become benefactors of mankind (Seznec, p. 14). The twelfth-century Peter Comestor's popular Historia scholastica, for example, placed Isis in the role of teacher of the alphabet and of writing to the Egyptians, Minerva in the role of teacher of the arts, including the art of weaving (Seznec, p. 16), Venus in the role of teacher of the courtesan's art (Seznec, p. 22).

"The pagan divinities," Seznec observes (p. 149), "served as a vehicle for ideas so profound and so tenacious that it would have been impossible for them to perish." The Magdalen, during the early centuries of the Christian era, becomes, through eclectic imaginations of the writers of apocryphal works and through Origen's "mystical" interpretation of the Song of Songs, a vessel for ideas so deeply rooted in human thought that it would indeed have been impossible for them to perish.

She is, I think, chosen as a vessel for these ideas because she is, in John's gospel, shown as the woman closest to the Christ; her role is archetypal, suggestive of every fertility goddess of antiquity who searched for and found the heaven god who could restore life to her and to her earth. The Madgalen embodies the ambivalent ideas of the

feminine as the preserver and restorer of life, as the dangerous but fascinating seducer of man, as the pure spirit Sophia-Wisdom, all, as Neumann demonstrates in his study of the Great Mother, attributes of the Great Goddess. And the goddess, the feminine, is, as she has probably always been, linked in humanity's imagination with the god, the masculine.

By shaping myths around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels, then, writers during the early centuries of Christianity gave to the composite Magdalen attributes of the great goddesses of antiquity and so, within the framework of Christianity, not only fulfilled a desire for continuity but also bequeathed to the Western world the prototype for the literary figure of the Magdalen.

CHAPTER V

FULFILLMENT OF THE PROTOTYPE OF THE MAGDALEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Although the prototype for the literary figure of the Magdalen was created during the early centuries of Christianity, the Magdalen does not, so far as we can learn, receive individual treatment in Western drama and art until the twelfth century. It is in the century which Charles Homer Haskins, in The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, characterizes as a period of "intensification of intellectual life,"⁴⁴ and which Steven Runciman, in The Medieval Manichee, calls a "great age of heresy"⁴⁵ that the Magdalen emerges as a literary figure in the West.

It is not, I think, altogether coincidence that the Magdalen captivates the imaginations of playwrights in the century of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her courts of love, of the wandering scholars, of the great Christian mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, of the crusades.

⁴⁴Charles Homer Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1927; 11th printing, Meridian Books, New York and Cleveland, 1966), p. 16.

⁴⁵Steven Runciman, The Medieval Manichee, a Study of Christian Dualist Heresy (New York, 1961), p. 125.

The Magdalen's appeal to playwrights in the twelfth century coincides with the emergence of dualistic ideas similar to those we have seen in the early centuries of Christianity when the Magdalen myth took its shape. Runciman observes in The Medieval Manichee (p. 118) that the crusades carried old Eastern dualism into the West, particularly into France and Germany. We see enter the very places where the Magdalen attracts especial attention in the twelfth century the old dualistic rejection of the material with its concomitant emphasis on the spiritual. The dualistic view of matter and spirit as absolute opposites is reflected both in an increase in asceticism and in the spread of conflicting views of woman and of Eros.

Ernst Robert Curtius in European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages points out four views of Eros which dominate the twelfth century.⁴⁶ The ascetic ideal, represented by Bernard of Morlaix in De contemptu mundi, as Curtius says, curses Eros and womankind. Bernard of Morlaix, we see, shares the view of early writers of the apocrypha who also held the world and woman-matter in contempt.

Mysticism, represented by Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote no less than eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs, spiritualizes Eros, as we have seen Origen do in his

⁴⁶Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (Bern, 1948), translated from the German by Willard R. Trask (Harper Torchbook edition, New York and Evanston, 1963), p. 122.

third-century commentary and homilies on the Song of Songs.

Humanism, represented by Bernard Silvestris of Tours, who, Curtius points out (p. 112), turned to ancient Eastern sources, consecrates Eros in his De universitate mundi. In his universe, where "religion and sexuality mingle," woman is a generative force. Profligacy, on the contrary, which Curtius exemplifies with the Latin poem "The Council of Love at Remiremont," debases Eros and mocks woman.

I would add another view of Eros to Curtius' list. It is the view of love which "The Council of Love at Remiremont" mocks. It is represented, of course, in the cult of "Courtly love" that came to Provence in the eleventh century and moved throughout the West during the Middle Ages. "Courtly love" ritualizes and romanticizes Eros. Woman is idealized; as the beloved, she is lord and master, "midons," of her devoted slave who is ennobled by his ritualized love for her.⁴⁷

All of these conflicting views of Eros and of woman show up in the medieval literary figure of the Magdalen. We see her as a "courtly lover" trying to convert her audience to the ennobling "religion of love," as a profligate prostitute abandoned to Lechery, as the lover of Christ the spiritualized Eros, as an ascetic leaving the material

⁴⁷On courtly love, see, for example, C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, a Study in Medieval Tradition (London, 1936, revised edition, 1953), Chapter I.

world, and as a generative force. The humanist ideal of woman as a generative force is, however, dominant in the Digby playwright's heroine who, even at the end of her thirty years of ascetic life in the desert, fervently kisses the earth as she dies. The medieval literary figure of the Magdalen is, then, as was the Magdalen of the early Christian period, a vessel for conflicting ideas.

By the time the playwrights isolate the Magdalen from the other Marys of the Quem quaeritis plays, Mary Magdalene has become an important religious figure in the Western Catholic Church. To the religious figure have been attached legends which are to affect the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby Mary Magdalene who goes to Marseilles as "an holy apostylesse" and who becomes a hermit to gain "spiritual strength."

Victor Saxer has thoroughly treated the cult of the Magdalen in the West in his excellent study Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident, and he has touched on the cult in the East in an article "Les Saintes Marie Madeleine et Marie de Bethanie dans le Tradition Liturgique et Homiletique Orientale."⁴⁸ Saxer points out that the cult of the Magdalen originates in the East where she is first honored as one of the "myrophores," myrrh-bearers, who go to the tomb to anoint the Christ ("Les Saintes," p. 4).

⁴⁸In Revue des Sciences Religieuses (Paris, 1958), Vol. XXXII, pp. 1-37--hereafter referred to as "Les Saintes."

The Magdalen is, however, by the seventh century individually honored at Ephesus on July 22 ("Les Saintes," p. 30), for there had grown up sometime between A.D. 449 and 590 ("Les Saintes," p. 37) a belief that her tomb was next to the Seven Sleepers' Cave at Ephesus ("Les Saintes," p. 8). The "great and admirable" Magdalen, one liturgical notice reports, "despite the weakness of her sex," had, after Christ's ascension, gone with John the Evangelist to "preach" at Ephesus where she, "being mortal," died on July 22 and was buried near the Seven Sleepers' Grotto ("Les Saintes," p. 9). But her body was supposedly moved to Constantinople in the late ninth or early tenth century, and there too she was honored on July 22 ("Les Saintes," p. 9). An eleventh-century notice from a Coptic Church indicates that she was also honored in Egypt as one who had preached there ("Les Saintes," p. 11).

The linking of the Magdalen with John at Ephesus may derive from the much-copied but controversial Acts of John.⁴⁹ An obviously popular work, the Acts of John combines an adventure tale with unmistakable dualistic ideas, and it includes a pastoral scene in which Jesus and the disciples join in a round dance.

⁴⁹Eusebius mentions the Acts of John, so it may date from the third century (NTA, II, 214). A Latin version was current in the fourth century; Augustine refers to it (NTA, II, 201). Although the work was condemned by the Nicene Council of 787 (NTA, II, 192), Arabic copies were made as late as 1324 (NTA, II, 193).

John, in the Acts, is shown destroying the temple of Artemis at Ephesus and converting the people who are still, John says, echoing Paul, "being corrupted" by their "ancient mysteries." Accompanying John is "the virtuous prostitute" (NTA, II, 243). John is also shown, as he is about to die, praying to Jesus as "thou who hast kept me pure for thyself and untouched by union with a woman; who when I wished to marry in my youth didst appear to me and say to me, 'John, I need thee.'" John thanks Jesus for having rid him of the "foul madness that is in the flesh" (NTA, II, 257).

From the Acts of John, or a similar source, must come not only the linking of the Magdalen with John as a "preacher" at Ephesus but also the medieval legend explaining the reason for the Magdalen's having become a prostitute. Even though the Digby playwright does not use the legend, other medieval writers, including John Mirk, do. Mirk says in his Festial (p. 203) that, "as many bokys tellyth," when John the Evangelist should have married the Magdalen, Christ bade John to follow him, "and soo he dyd," and the Magdalen was "wrath" and therefore gave herself "all to lechery." Just as the Gospel of John sharpens the Magdalen's closeness to Christ, so popular legend closely links the Magdalen with John.

Behind the picture of the Digby heroine as "an holy apostylesse" are, then, the Eastern traditions of the Magdalen as a preacher, and behind the Eastern traditions

is the Magdalen of the Apocrypha. Traditions do not, I suggest, easily perish; they travel, sometimes disguised, sometimes as stowaways. The Eastern traditions were taken over by Aix-en-Provence in the early twelfth century when Aix claimed to have been evangelized by the Magdalen in the first century and to have her tomb (Le Culte, p. 108).

Aix was only one of many French cities that honored the Magdalen. Marseilles, believing that the Magdalen had come from Aix to convert Marseilles from the worship of antique deities, rebuilt in the thirteenth century a temple, thought to be the temple of Diana, and dedicated in the rebuilt chapel an altar to the Magdalen (Le Culte, p. 244). On the altar was a bas-relief in marble representing the Magdalen preaching the Christian faith in Marseilles. At this altar during Easter services, from the thirteenth century into the eighteenth century, a procession chanted in Provençal a song which recalled the Magdalen's conversion of the king and queen of Marseilles (Le Culte, p. 245). The tradition continued through the centuries, according to Saxer, until the medieval song was suppressed, and finally mass was forbidden to be held in the building, and the Magdalen-Diana chapel was demolished in 1781 (Le Culte, p. 245).

That the Digby playwright used the legend of the Magdalen's mission to Marseilles in his dramatization of her long life is indeed obvious, and that the Digby heroine

retains attributes of an antique goddess, in her bringing about the queen's conception of a child, in her preserving the life of the mother and child, we have earlier noted. In the tradition of the Magdalen's succession to Diana at Marseilles, we see again the association in mankind's imagination of the Magdalen with the archetypal feminine embodied in the great goddesses of antiquity. We also see support for a thesis developed by Paul Saintyves in Les Saints Successeurs des Dieux: "The cult of the saints was born out of the pagan cult of the dead and of heroes, it is," Saintyves says, "the rigorous prolongation" of the pagan cult.⁵⁰

The medieval Magdalen not only replaces a Diana but also fills a gap left in the imagination by the displacement of the antique goddesses. The popular linking of the composite Magdalen with the goddess Diana, a protector of woman and of life, affects, whether directly or indirectly, the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby play.

The Magdalen of the Digby play is directly affected by another medieval addition to the mythical Magdalen. Attached to the Magdalen was part of the legend of Mary of Egypt, a charming prostitute who, according to tradition, became a hermit and was fed by angels and was clothed only in her long hair during her forty-seven years in the desert.

⁵⁰Paul Saintyves, Les Saints Successeurs des Dieux (Paris, 1907), p. 406.

Although Mary of Egypt continued to be honored, the Magdalen, considered to be the first hermit, became the patron saint of the many medieval Christian mystics who became hermits (Le Culte, p. 126).

An Old English Martyrology,⁵¹ written about A.D. 850, tells of the Magdalen's having, after Christ's ascension, such a "great longing" for Christ that "she could no longer bear to look on any man" and therefore went "into the desert and lived there thirty years unknown to all men." She ate no human food, the legend tells us, but was daily taken to heaven by angels where "she heard something of the heavenly joys" and so "she never hungered nor thirsted." A "mass priest" found her as she was dying and buried her, the legend concludes, "and many miracles happened at her grave."

The legend of the Magdalen as a hermit is also found in a Vita eremitica beatae Mariae Magdalенаe,⁵² which Saxer believes probably came from Italy in the ninth or tenth century (Le Culte, p. 126). To the title was added in the twelfth century the designation of the Magdalen's place of hermitage as the grotto, Sainte-Baume, in the diocese of Marseilles (Le Culte, p. 131). From the legend, incorporated into Jacobus a Voragine's life of the Magdalen in the

⁵¹Edited by George Herzfeld (London, 1900), EETS 116, p. 127.

⁵²Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina (Brussels, 1898-1901, reprinted 1949), pp. 5453-5656.

Legenda Aurea in the thirteenth century, comes not only the Digby playwright's dramatization of the Magdalen's life as a hermit but also the many and varied iconographic representations of the Magdalen as a hermit. And Victor Saxer considers the Vita eremitica of the Magdalen, which appeared in many versions and was widely read during the twelfth century, the "literary" cause of the popularity of hermit life during the Middle Ages (Le Culte, p. 126).

The medieval cult of the Magdalen was, however, by no means confined to mystics. Saxer points out that throughout England, France, and Germany, with rapid multiplication of Magdalen relics and sanctuaries during the eleventh century, Mary Magdalene soon replaced the apostles and even Mary the mother of Jesus as a venerated saint (Le Culte, p. 68). Exeter, claiming to have a finger of the Magdalen, built in the tenth century the first Western sanctuary dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene (Le Culte, p. 54). Vézelay, claiming to have the body of the Magdalen, was, however, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the center of pilgrimage in honor of the Magdalen. It was at Vézelay during Easter in 1146 that a miracle involving Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine was attributed to the Magdalen. In preparation for the second crusade, King Louis and Queen Eleanor had drawn such a crowd for a grand outdoor ceremony at Vézely that the platform collapsed, and word of the Magdalen's having saved the King and the Queen and all the crowd from injury spread across France (Le Culte, pp. 94-95).

After the second crusade, reports of Magdalen miracles multiplied, liturgical celebrations of Saint Mary Magdalene increased, and the popular appeal of the Magdalen grew and manifested itself in varied monuments to her. In those monuments, which affect the literary figure of the Magdalen, we again see evidence of her having been given attributes of a goddess, of a "Lady of Transformation."

The goddess as a Lady of Transformation, Erich Neumann points out in The Great Mother (p. 286), transforms matter into a higher, spiritual principle. She is therefore the goddess of wine. The Magdalen takes on attributes of the Lady of Transformation, for, as we noted at the beginning of this study, before the end of the twelfth century a vineyard at Lyon was named for her (Le Culte, p. 247). And there is, Professor Arnold Williams points out, an excellent wine in the Italian Tyrol called Santa Maddelena. It is in the Middle Ages that the Magdalen becomes the patron saint of "winegrowers."

The Digby playwright, we recall, places the Magdalen in a tavern where she sips wine, a "good restoratyff" to relieve her from "stoddys and hevynes," and praises the taverner as a "groom of blysse" who is to her courteous and kind. The Magdalen's role in the tavern scene again exemplifies, I think, the Digby playwright as homo ludens working on the borderline between jest and earnest. The scene between the taverner of Jerusalem, who extols his

fine European wines, and the Western winegrowers' patron saint, who delights in the wine, probably evoked in the fifteenth-century audience the unique delight that springs from experiencing recognition and surprise.

The popular identification of the Magdalen with the archetypal mysteries of the feminine is further manifested in her patronage of perfume-manufacturers, pharmacists, glove-makers, hair-dressers, podiatrists, comb-makers, foundrymen, barrel-makers, tawers, weavers, and gardeners. The Magdalen's role as a patron of the gardeners links her with ancient goddesses of the earth and of fertility. Her role as the patron of the weavers links her with all the great goddesses of antiquity, for the great goddesses, as Neumann points out (p. 277), forever linked with the web of life, are weavers, as well as spinners.

The honoring of the Magdalen by medieval craftsmen, food-growers, and wine-makers clearly indicates the popular attribution of characteristics of antique goddesses to the Magdalen. And between the antique goddesses and the patron saint of the Middle Ages are the intermediary figures of the Bride of the Song of Songs and the Magdalen-Sophia-Athene--the "spiritual" Mariham of the Apocrypha.

It is the "spiritual" Magdalen, transformed from a prostitute, who inspires the establishment, during the Middle Ages, of religious orders for reformed prostitutes. The penitent prostitutes, called in Germany "Weissfrauen"

and in France "Dames Blanches," because they wore white, according to Louis Réau (Iconographie, II, 849), especially honored the Magdalen. The wide-spread appeal of the Magdalen during the Middle Ages is further manifested in the fact that many women were, from at least the twelfth century on, given the name of the Magdalen. Cities and streets, colleges and hospitals, as well as many churches, were, as we have earlier observed, named for her.

Although the peak of the Magdalen cult was, according to Saxer (Le Culte, p. 325), reached in the thirteenth century, the Magdalen continued to be especially honored in the Roman Catholic liturgy until the sixteenth century. Among the many sermons devoted to her as a model of the Christian penitent, of the contemplative soul, of love, of the Church, of an apostle to the apostles, of the second Eve, are those sermons on the Song of Songs by the great twelfth-century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux.

Through sermons by Bernard of Clairvaux the complex Magdalen becomes, as the anointers of the Christ had been in Origen's third-century commentary and homilies on the Song of Songs, the Bride, "soror mea sponsa," of the Song of Songs. The Bride is, as she had been in Origen's works, also identified with the Church and with the Soul. The fifteenth-century Digby playwright, whose imagination is most eclectic if not always syncretic, reflects both a familiarity and a sympathy with specific interpretations set

forth in Saint Bernard's sermons, and the playwright reflects too his awareness of Saint Bernard's identification of the Magdalen with the Bride of the Song of Songs.

The Magdalen echoes Bernard's explication of "white" when she expresses her sudden realization of the meaning of white, the color of the angels' clothing, as "tokening meekness." Bernard of Clairvaux in Sermon XXVIII on the Song of Songs, following Origen's explication of the beautiful but "black" Bride of the Song of Songs, elaborates on the "black" heart filled with sin in contrast with the "white" heart filled with humility, and Bernard specifically identifies white with the color of angels' vestments.⁵³

Although the Digby playwright's use of Bernard's explication may seem extraneous, the Digby playwright, as well as some of the audience, knew that penitent prostitutes, of whom the Magdalen was the patron saint, had been from the thirteenth century on, called Dames Blanches, Weissfrauen, White Ladies. The Magdalen's exclamation, when she sees the angels clothed in white, held, then, a particular delight for the "sensible folk" in the fifteenth-century audience. "Sensible folk in the Middle Ages," as G. G. Coulton remarks in Medieval Faith and Symbolism, "were a great deal less medieval than some of their more enthusiastic modern

⁵³Patrologiae Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1854), Vol. 182, cols. 921-928--hereafter referred to as MPL.

champions."⁵⁴ The Magdalen's audience may have smiled when they heard the patron saint of the White Ladies say:

O, gracyus god, now I vndyrstond!
 thys clothynge of whyte is tokonyng of mekeness.
 now, gracyus lord, I woll not wond,
 yower preseptt to obey with lowlynesse.

(11. 1607-1610)

The Digby playwright also draws the explication of Christ the gardener from an especially joyous sermon, Sermon XL (MPL 184, 207-214), by Bernard of Clairvaux. The sermon explicates the words from Song of Songs 5: 1: "Veni in hortum meum, soror mea sponsa," Come into my garden, sister my bride. The Digby playwright, giving the Magdalen a role similar to the role given her in the second-century Pistis Sophia, has his heroine, the patron saint of gardeners who mistakes the Christ for "Symoyd" the gardener, evoke explication of Christ as the gardener of men's hearts from the Christ himself. And the Digby heroine, in her expression of joy for the "dear worthy emperor" Christ's "tydyng," which will make all those who "reign after us" joyous too, not only echoes the joy of the twelfth-century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux but also recalls the Magdalen of the Pistis Sophia, the "Mariham the happy" who was compassionate for all mankind.

⁵⁴G. G. Coulton, Medieval Faith and Symbolism (Oxford, 1928; Harper Torchbook, 1953), p. 249.

Bernard, again elaborating on Origen, equates the Magdalen-Church-Bride with the contemplative soul in contrast with Martha the figure of the active soul, and, in Sermon LVII (MPL 183, 1050-1055), praises the divine love of the Christ that leads to contemplation. The Digby playwright also uses, as we have seen, the tradition of the Magdalen as Christ's lover and the contemplative. The Digby playwright shows, however, the Magdalen and the Christ both as a "repast contemplatyf," for just as the Magdalen blesses the Christ, after he has forgiven her of her "wrecchednesse," as a "repast contemplatyf" so the king of Marseilles hails the Magdalen as "repast contemplatyff." The Digby heroine is, as was the Magdalen of the Apocrypha, Christ's feminine counterpart.

Another similarity between the Digby heroine and Saint Bernard's Bride of the Song of Songs is reflected in the Digby playwright's emphasis on the Magdalen's contrition after she has anointed Christ's feet at Simon's house. While Bernard, in Sermon X (MPL 183, 819-824), identifies the ointment used by the Bride-Magdalen-Soul with contrition, the Digby playwright has Jesus praise the Magdalen, after she has anointed him, for being "expert" in contrition. Bernard of Clairvaux also emphasizes, as did Origen, in Sermon XXII (MPL 183, 875-884), the love and desire of the Bride-Magdalen-Church-Soul for the Bridegroom-Christ. The Digby playwright dramatizes the love of the Magdalen for the Christ as well as the love of the Christ for her.

The Digby playwright also parallels Bernard of Clairvaux, who expresses in sermons and meditations his ecstatic devotion to Mary the mother of Jesus, in his giving Jesus the rhapsodic hymn to his mother, the Moon, whose joys "no clerk can write," but the Digby playwright shows Jesus, even as he hymns the Virgin, remembering the "kindness" of his "servant" the Magdalen. And the Digby heroine, an angel tells her, is to be honored with joy and reverence, enhanced in heaven above virgins.

Although Bernard of Clairvaux is well known for his mystic devotion to Mary the Virgin, he is, through his following Origen's example of linking Christ's anointers with the Bride of the Song of Songs, important in the renewed literary interest in the Magdalen, Christ's "sister-bride," whose prototype was created in the early centuries of Christianity. The Magdalen of the fifteenth-century Digby play fulfills the third-century Origen's explication of the Soul-Mary, who, coming to "know itself," follows "sacred pursuits" and becomes through the "cosmetics" of Christ-joy a Christ herself. The Digby heroine, like the second-century Pistis Sophia, receives from Jesus "by right inheritance" a "crown to bere" with the Christ in heaven. And the Digby heroine, like the Bride of the Song of Songs, retains characteristics of goddesses of antiquity.

CHAPTER VI

EXPANSION OF THE MEDIEVAL FIGURE OF THE MAGDALEN IN SELECTED PLAYS AND ICONOGRAPHY

So popular and so many-sided a figure inevitably captured the imaginations of playwrights and artists during the complex century of an "intensification of intellectual life," of the wandering scholars, of the crusades. The Magdalen, as a medieval literary figure, becomes, much as she had been in the early Christian period, a vessel for ideas too profound and too tenacious to perish. From the twelfth-century Easter plays to the fifteenth-century Digby Mary Magdalene, the literary figure expands and iconographic representations of the Magdalen multiply.

An exhaustive study of the Magdalen in either iconography or literature remains yet to be done, but to begin to appreciate the representations of the Magdalen in iconography and the expansion of the literary figure between the twelfth and the fifteenth century, we need here examine only three plays that clearly illustrate the Magdalen's expanded role in the drama and to consider a few of the numerous iconographic representations of the many-sided Magdalen. We look, then, at the Magdalen's role in the twelfth-century Easter

play from Tours, in the thirteenth-century Passion play from Benediktbeuren, and in the fifteenth-century Jean Michel's Mystère de la Passion.

In the first expansions of the literary figure we see an attempt to isolate the Magdalen as the woman closest to the Christ, the same attempt that we observed in the apocryphal writings of the early Christian period. The Quem quaeritis play is expanded to include the recognition scene between the Magdalen and the resurrected Christ, the scene pictured in the Gospel of John, and the Magdalen is given by the playwrights extended songs of lamentation for the Christ. In the twelfth century, then, playwrights restore to the Magdalen of the drama the attribute of the archetypal figure of the earth goddess lamenting the heaven god.

A particularly lovely lament is given the Magdalen in the twelfth-century play of Tours. Much of the charm of the Magdalen's lament springs from the archetypal character of laments themselves. The twelfth-century playwright well understood the dramatic power of laments, which had been related to religious ritual since at least four thousand years before Christ.⁵⁵ The Tours playwright knew also the dramatic power of the composite Magdalen and her identification with the Bride of the Song of Songs. The long lament

⁵⁵On laments in religious ritual see, for example, Peter Crossley-Holland, "Non-Western Music," in The Pelican History of Music, ed. Alec Robertson and Denis Stevens (Baltimore, Maryland, 1962), I, 13-118.

given the Magdalen by the Tours playwright links her at once closely with the Christ and with the Bride of the Song of Songs.

The Magdalen, wringing her hands and weeping, "plausis manibus, plorando," speaks of her misery, of her great grief for the death of Jesus Christ, whose mercy in forgiving her of her "grave sins" she holds in memory.⁵⁶ The Tours playwright momentarily breaks the unity of his picture of the lamenting Magdalen by trying to place her in the twelfth-century setting of the joyous celebration of "this day" of Easter. But obviously less concerned with the specific day than with the lamentation of his literary figure, he has the Magdalen, after she thanks Jesus, the king of all the angels, for having been "killed for us" ("pro nobis occisus est"), and praises the greatness of "this day" to be celebrated in joy and in remembering that Jesus arose from the dead (11. 146-148), resume her lament.

She further mourns the death of "Jesus Christ, God and man," her hope, "the living health of the world," and asks him to remember her and his friend Lazarus. She hopes, she says, to see Jesus living, with the sceptre of the Empire, and again lamenting her grief, she expresses her helplessness: "What shall I do? What shall I say?"

Deus et homo! Deus et homo! Deus et homo!

⁵⁶Text of the play is in Karl Young, The Drama of the Medieval Church (Oxford, 1933; revised edition, 1962), I, 438-447.

Ihesu Christe, tu spes mea, salus viva seculi,
 Memorare Magdalene tuique amici Lazari.
 Te vivum spero videre cum sceptro imperii.
 Me misera! me misera! me misera!
 Quid agam? Heu! tristis, quid dicam?

(11. 151-156)

The scene dramatized in the Quem quaeritis plays follows: the angel asks the woman why she weeps, whom she seeks, and tells her and the other Marys that Christ has arisen. But again the Magdalen, lifting her hands toward heaven, "leuet manus ad celum" (Young, I, 444), laments and begs her Lord not to abandon her, to appear to her, to have pity on her, "miserere Magdalene" (11. 165-166), as he did when he forgave her of her sins. And in her grief, she faints.

The other Marys come to her, and with Mary Jacobi holding the Magdalen by her right arm and Mary Salome holding her by her left arm, they lift the Magdalen up from the earth and tell her, "dear sister," that her grief is too great.⁵⁷

The Magdalen, echoing both the Gospel of John and the Bride of the Song of Songs, says: "My heart is burning; I long to see my Lord; I search and I do not find where they have placed him."

⁵⁷"Deinde veniat Maria Iacobi et sustentet brachium dextrum, et Maria Salome per sinistram et leuet de terra Mariam Magdalenam" (Young, I, 444).

Ardens est cor meum; desidero videre
 Dominum meum; quero et non invenio
 ubi posuerunt eum.

(11. 170-171)

The poetic laments and the dramatic action given the Magdalen by the Tours playwright demonstrate both the attempt to isolate the Magdalen as the feminine figure closest to the Christ and the desire to suggest the Bride of the Song of Songs in the literary figure of the Magdalen.

The moving scene of the Tours figure of the Magdalen fainting from her grief for the death of Jesus and being comforted by the other Marys appealed to a twelfth-century artist who carved the scene in stone. The work appears in the Chapel of Modena in Italy, and Émile Mâle believes that it was carved by a Provençal artist who knew the Tours play well.⁵⁸

The Magdalen in the sculpture has, we see from a photograph of the work in Mâle's L'Art Religieux du XII^e Siècle (p. 137, fig. 116), fainted on the sepulchre itself. Her head lies on the tomb, her hands caress the tomb. The two other Marys stand on either side of her, looking down on her with pity and trying to comfort her. Mary Salome's hand rests gently on the Magdalen's shoulder and seems to be tenderly patting the grief-stricken Magdalen. Although the

⁵⁸Émile Mâle, L'Art Religieux du XII^e Siècle (Paris, 1922), pp. 136-137.

Magdalen's face is not individualized in this twelfth-century iconographic representation of her, her face, exhausted by grief, centers the artist's work and draws attention to her as an individual woman grieving for the Christ, the God whom she, like the Bride of the Song of Songs, has sought and not yet found. Neither the artist nor the Tours playwright ignores, I think, the archetypal element in the figure of the Magdalen. Although the Magdalen of the Tours play is not yet the complex heroine of the Digby play, she is a literary figure expanded beyond the Mary Magdalene of both the New Testament canonical gospels and the Quem quaeritis plays.

Coinciding with the expansion of the Magdalen's role in the Tours play is the expansion of the play itself. Included in the Tours playwright's additions to the Quem quaeritis plays is a scene showing the three Marys as they go, lamenting, to buy ointment from the "Mercator" and his young apprentice. The merchant scene simultaneously places a potentially comic figure in the Easter play and mingles a contemporary medieval figure with New Testament figures. The merchant scene becomes, particularly in later medieval German plays, a long and highly farcical scene. In, for example, Das Erlauer Osterspiel III, in which we earlier observed the dramatization of Peter's resentment of the Magdalen, the Merchant, the Merchant's Wife, and "Rubin" indulge in a lengthy bickering match.

As the three Marys, in the Tours play, approach the merchant, they lament the death of Jesus. The Magdalen begins:

Omnipotens Pater altissime,
angelorum rector mitissime,
quid faciunt iste miserrime?
Heu! quantus est noster dolor!

(11. 21-24)

(Omnipotent Father most high,
most sweet head of the angels,
what have your sufferings brought?
O! how great is our dolor!)

The two other Marys lament, with the refrain "Heu! quantus est noster dolor!" and Mary Salome says that they should buy ointment to anoint the body of Jesus as protection against worms.

The merchant, a shrewd business man, knows the right chord to sound to the lamenting women. He invites them to buy his ointment to anoint the "sacred body of the Lord," because, he tells the Marys, if they use his ointment to anoint the body, it can no more putrefy, nor can the worms eat it.

Quod, si corpus possetis ungere,
non amplius posset putrescere,
neque vermes possent comedere.

(11. 37-39)

The Marys ask the merchant how much his ointment costs, he asks them how much they want to buy and finally offers them the ointment at a ridiculously high price, which the Marys accept "libenter," willingly (1. 65). The Marys, lamenting, take the ointment to the sepulchre and are told by an angel that they do not need the ointment, "Non eget unguentum" (1. 78), for Jesus has arisen.

The merchant scene, like the scene of the Magdalen fainting at the tomb, appealed to the artist who did the work in the chapel at Modena. The scene, reproduced in Mâle's L'Art Religieux du XII^e Siecle (p. 136, fig. 115), shows the three Marys standing beside the merchant's counter while the older, bearded merchant weighs the ointment on his scale, and his young apprentice, smiling, looks on, apparently pleased with learning the tricks of the trade. Although the merchant scene is not, in the text of the Tours play, explicitly comic, it could be presented as comic.

The mingling of the potentially comic with the serious, of the contemporary medieval figures with the Biblical figures, links the twelfth-century playwright with the fifteenth-century Digby playwright as homo ludens working on the borderline between jest and earnest. Both playwrights, while they dramatize the event central to the Christian after-life, turn their eyes, and the eyes of their audiences, toward life on this earth and toward people living in this world where the comic and the serious mingle, where worms

can gnaw even a "sacred body" buried in the earth. Both playwrights emphasize the "humanity" of the Christ, the man-God, and both place the Magdalen close to the man-God.

The Tours playwright, through giving the Magdalen extended laments and dramatic action revealing her grief, shows her closeness to the Christ, but since Christ himself makes only a brief appearance in the Tours play, Christ's love for the Magdalen is not vividly shown, as it is in the Digby play. Although the twelfth-century figure of the Magdalen has not the complexity of the fifteenth-century Digby heroine, she is, in the Tours play, isolated from the other Marys for special treatment as the once-sinful woman most grieved by the death of the Christ. And the Magdalen of the Tours play echoes the Bride of the Song of Songs as she, lamenting, searches for the Christ.

The figure of the Magdalen begins, then, in the Tours play, to fulfill the prototype of the Magdalen created during the early centuries of Christianity. She inspires the dramatist to write extended poetic laments and attracts the attention of artists. By the thirteenth century she attracts the attention of the wandering scholars who write for the "worldly" Magdalen goliardic songs. The Magdalen herself becomes a contemporary medieval figure, and yet she retains her archetypal attributes.

The Magdalen's worldly life, implicit in the Tours play when the Magdalen mentions Jesus' having forgiven her of

her "grave sins," is made explicit in the thirteenth-century Benediktbeuren Passion play. By dramatizing her life as a prostitute and her subsequent repentance, the Benediktbeuren playwright pictures the Magdalen as a complex figure capable of change. The vitality of the literary figure is therefore augmented by the Benediktbeuren playwright's dramatization of the Magdalen's "Weltleben."

The play itself is a lively music-drama, and the Magdalen sings directly to the audience goliardic songs, mostly in German, the language of her audience.⁵⁹ The Magdalen is, then, a figure contemporary with her audience. But she is simultaneously a timeless figure, for she represents an attribute of the archetypal feminine, the seductive woman, a Venus. Carl Orff, aware of both the medieval-contemporary and the timeless characteristics in the Benediktbeuren Magdalen and her music, incorporated into his twentieth-century composition Carmina Burana the Magdalen's vernacular carpe diem song, the rollicking "Chramer, gip die varwe mier," sung by the Magdalen as she adorns herself to seduce the young men and urges the men and women in her audience to practice the "ennobling" art of love.

As the bold seducer of the "iungen man," the Magdalen plays a comic role. The comic element stems from the Benediktbeuren playwright's mingling, in light-hearted

⁵⁹Text of the play is in Karl Young's The Drama of the Medieval Church, I, 518-533.

parody, the contemporary with the omnitemporal, blending the "courtly love" advocate with the archetypal dangerous but fascinating seducer of men.

Although her seduction songs are in the vernacular, her theme song is a Latin lyric, "Mundi delectatio," which she sings three times, twice in the rejection of the Good Angel's appeal to her to leave her worldly lovers and follow Jesus. The song, with its word-play and lilting abandon, introduces the Magdalen to the audience as a woman delighting in the world, the sophisticated world, with its pleasing and admirable "conversatio" to be enjoyed, its "wantonness" not to be shunned. And the Magdalen makes clear that she has a body which is to be adorned.

The vitality of the song eludes my translation, but I feel sure that the lively humor was not lost on the thirteenth-century audience who heard the Magdalen sing three times her hymn to "worldly joy." She sings:

Mundi delectatio dulcis est et grata;
 Eius conversatio suavis et ornata.
 Mundi sunt delicie, quibus estuare
 Volo, nec lasciviam eius devitare.
 Pro mundano gaudio vitam terminabo;
 Bonis temporalibus ego militabo.
 Nil curans de ceteris corpus procurabo,
 Variis coloribus illud perornabo.

(11. 42-49)

As she vows, "In worldly joy, I shall end my life; I shall serve under the banner of temporal goods; caring nothing for the rest, I shall look after the body; with various hues I shall greatly adorn it," she goes to the merchant.

She sings of her desire to buy, for "much money," perfume for her body, and when the merchant sells her the very best perfume, the Magdalen sings, in German, her request for rouge for her cheeks. She sings: "Shopkeeper, give me color which may redden my cheeks, so that I compel the young men to think of wooing me."

Chramer, gip die varwe mier,
diu min wengel roete,
da mit ich di iungen man
an ir danch der minnenliebe noete.

(11. 58-61)

She turns to the young men and sings: "Look on me, young men; allow me to delight you."

Seht mich an
iungen man.
Lat mich eu gefallen.

(11. 62-64)

Then addressing her audience with a carpe diem song, she urges the "good men" and "lovely ladies" to make love, for, she says, wooing, "minne," will ennoble them, let them be held in high esteem.

Minnet, tugentliche man,

minnekliche vrawen.

Minne tuot ev hoech gemut

unde lat evch in hohen eren shauven.

(11. 65-68)

Again she tells the young men to look on her and to allow her to delight them. She hails the world so rich in joys, "also vreudenriche," and vows to obey the world always (11. 71-74).

She goes to sleep, and an Angel addresses her by name and tells her of "Jesus the Nazarene," who forgives sins and who is now at Simon's house. The Magdalen arises and again sings her hymn to the world's joys, "Mundi delectatio."

As "Amator," her lover, approaches, she greets him. Then, like a Venus teaching young women the courtesan's art, the Magdalen sings to the young girls the wonders of the cosmetic merchant's wares. "They make us beautiful and pleasing," she says (11. 83-88). The Magdalen and the girls purchase cosmetics from the merchant while he sings the praises of his goods (11. 90-95).

Again the Magdalen sleeps while the Angel repeats his message to her, but she once more arises singing "Mundi delectatio." With the Angel's third message, the Magdalen at last laments her past life, full of evil, "Heu! vita preterita vita plena malis" (11. 98-101), and the Angel rejoices in her repentance. The Magdalen condemns her

worldly ornaments, her dazzling clothes, her evil lovers, and she takes off her gaudy clothes and puts on a black cloak (11. 104-107). "Amator" and, surprisingly, "Diabolus" leave. Evil, like winter, is expelled.

The Magdalen goes to the merchant, this time to buy "precious ointment" to anoint Jesus. She goes, weeping and lamenting her sins, to Simon's house. And the anointing scene, much like that of the Digby play, follows. But after Jesus forgives her of her sins and sends her away in peace, the Magdalen of the Benediktbeuren play again sings a lamentation of her sins, with a refrain, "Oi wei, oi wei, that I was ever born!"

Awve, auve, daz ich ie wart geborn!

(1. 144)

The penitential lament seems, as Karl Young says (I, 535), to be misplaced in the text. It is an expression of despair, of the "whanhope" which the Magdalen of the Digby play thanks Jesus for removing from her. If the lamentation belongs, as I think it does, in the scene showing the Magdalen on her visit to the merchant to buy ointment, the contrasting visits to the "Mercator" are sharpened. The Magdalen essentially exchanges her cosmetics box for her ointment jar, as she, in the Digby play, exchanges her balms precious of price in her worldly arbor for the precious balms to anoint the Christ in Simon's house.

In both the Benediktbeuren and the Digby plays the Magdalen participates in the archetypal "rite of passage,"

for through the "sleep of initiation" the Magdalen is "reborn." And, as Jane Harrison has pointed out in Themis, the "sleep of initiation" leads to a new birth.⁶⁰

Because the Benediktbeuren playwright saw in the complex mythical Magdalen the possibility for a dramatic change, for a "rebirth," he pictured the Magdalen as a figure at once contemporary with her audience and timeless. She is, in her worldly role, simultaneously a thirteenth-century woman and a representation of the archetypal seductive feminine. The Magdalen, even as a comic figure in her "Weltleben", is, then, in the Benediktbeuren play a vessel for the ambivalent view of woman, as she had been in the apocryphal writings centuries before.

Although the Magdalen's role takes up, as Karl Young observes (I, 534), virtually one-third of the Benediktbeuren Passion play, her part in the remainder of the play is negligible. She is not, as was the Magdalen of the Tours play, given an extended lament for the Christ. Instead, Mary the mother of Jesus is given by the Benediktbeuren playwright extensive laments for Christ in the crucifixion scene, which concludes the play. In both the twelfth-century and the thirteenth-century plays, however, the literary figure of the Magdalen is expanded far beyond the figure of the Quem quaeritis plays.

⁶⁰Jane Ellen Harrison, Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion and Themis, a study of the social origins of Greek religion (Reproduced from the revised Cambridge, England, edition of 1927; New York, 1962), p. 53.

The Magdalen of both the twelfth-century Tours play and the thirteenth-century Benediktbeuren play are closer kin to the Digby heroine than to each other, for the fifteenth-century Digby heroine retains both the archetypal role of the seductive woman and her place as the woman closest to the Christ. But beyond either of the earlier Magdalens, the Digby heroine reflects the generative force of the archetypal feminine.

That the Benediktbeuren playwright shares with both the Digby playwright and the Tours playwright the quality of homo ludens is obvious in his treatment of the Magdalen in her "Weltleben." He works on the borderline between jest and earnest as he pictures the Magdalen, like Venus herself, as a woman at once to be desired and feared.

The thirteenth-century playwright, in making the Magdalen at once a genuinely medieval and a timeless figure, sets an example for later Easter plays. Particularly in later German plays, the worldly life of the Magdalen is expanded. And the Magdalen's worldly life is treated, with a difference, by Jean Michel in his Mystère de la Passion, a play contemporary with the Digby Mary Magdalene.

The Magdalen of Jean Michel's fifteenth-century Mystère de la Passion is again the seductive woman, but more like the twentieth-century Nikos Kazantzakis' Magdalen in The Last Temptation of Christ than like any other medieval figure of the Magdalen, she fixes her eye on Jesus himself.

Jean Michel, Gustave Cohen points out, expanded and changed the Passion play of his predecessor Arnoul Greban.⁶¹

Michel's most impressive addition to Greban's play is the dramatization of the Magdalen's "mondanité."

Jean Michel, boldly homo ludens, juxtaposes the Magdalen's worldly life with Jesus' transfiguration.⁶² And the playwright foreshadows the Magdalen's worldly life with the mondanité and repentance of Lazarus. While Lazarus is addicted to hunting, the Magdalen is, as she was in the Benediktbeuren play, devoted to adorning herself to attract lovers. Jean Michel spices the mondanité of the Magdalen by placing her in the company of her two saucy chambermaids, Perusine and Pasiphee.

The Magdalen first appears, dressed in a "habit pomeux," an elegant frock, with her maids, and she suggests that they sing some "new songs" and live the "joyous life."

Disons quelques chanchons nouvelles

Et vivons de joyuese vie.

(p. 177)

The three of them sing a "popular song of their own choice" (p. 177). As they chatter about woman's privilege of making joyous noise to attract lovers, the Magdalen declares that

⁶¹Gustave Cohen, Le Théâtre en France au Moyen-Âge (Paris, 1928), I, 64.

⁶²Page references are to the text of Jean Michel's play included in Le Livre de Conduite du Regisseur et le Compte des Dépenses pour le Mystère de la Passion, Joué à Mons en 1501, ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris, 1925), pp. 7-454.

she is spirited, daring, so "Jamais ne me tiengs a ung!" Never, she says, confine me to one (p. 178). And while Pasiphee comments that not being confined to one lover is the common custom, else one would not take account of it, "Et aussi c'est le train commun/ Autrement on n'en tentroit compte" (p. 178), Jesus appears, transfigured, on the stage.

After Jesus' transfiguration and his return to "human form," the Magdalen calls for her perfume, her jewels, her mirror, to make herself gorgeous for the men. She performs her toilette on stage, asks for approval of her looks from her maids and is assured that she is altogether "à la mode" (pp. 181-183).

After scenes showing Jesus performing miracles, the scene moves to Martha and Lazarus as they discuss their concern for their sister. Lazarus says that the Magdalen has acquired a very bad reputation, "Elle acquiert tres mauvaix renom" (p. 207), and Martha goes to try to persuade her sister to save her reputation by changing her way of life.

The Magdalen orders Perusine to bring her most precious jewels to her as Martha comes to reproach her sister, "Only for the love of you, my sister," she says (p. 208). "Only for the love of you, my sister," the Magdalen mocks, and, after a rapid-fire exchange of words between the well-intentioned Martha and her spirited sister, the Magdalen orders Martha to go away (p. 209).

The next scene shows the Magdalen speaking with Tubal, Gedeon, and Abacut, whom she stops as they walk in front of her castle. From her window, she asks them why such a crowd is gathering, and Tubal tells her that the people are coming to hear the "fruitful" sermons of Jesus the very holy prophet (p. 212). The Magdalen asks what his sermons deal with: "Does he speak at all of joyous things in his sermons?" And Tubal tells her that Jesus' "sweet eloquence" makes all that the Prophet says joyous (p. 212).

The Magdalen then inquires about Jesus' physical appearance. "And is he of a very beautiful appearance to see?" Abacut answers that he is tall and straight, wise, steadfast, sedate, and grave, but this is not enough to satisfy the Magdalen's curiosity. She wants a full description of Jesus. She asks: Is he well formed? What is the shape of his face? How old is he? What kind of beard and hair does he have? What color? What is his complexion? What are his eyes like? His hands? "Les autres choses?" His clothes? (pp. 213-214).

She learns from the men that Jesus is the most handsome man in the world, is thirty-two years old, has long hair and a beard slightly curly and a little golden, is of a rosy-brown complexion, has eyes "clear as the beautiful moon" and beautiful well-shaped hands, that he is altogether pleasing to look upon. Asking Pasiphee and Perusine if she is pleasing and pretty enough and being reassured by the maids that she is quite pleasing, that her body is well-corseted,

"deriere et devant," the Magdalen goes to the temple to cast her eyes on the "most handsome man in the world." She stays at a distance from the crowd, certainly hoping that she will attract the attention of the good-looking preacher and that he will find her pleasing. But at the end of the sermon, the "seductive" Magdalen is, as Gustave Cohen aptly puts it, herself "seduced" by the words of the handsome Prophet.⁶³

The Magdalen weeps, laments her sins, and her maids praise Jesus (p. 215). Still dressed in her finery but wearing a "simple kerchief" on her head, the Magdalen goes to Simon's house (p. 216). She washes Jesus' feet, dries them with her hair, and anoints his head with "l'eau de Damas" (p. 217). Simon mutters about "la belle Magdaleine" so full of sin, and Jesus tells him the parable of the two debtors and forgives the Magdalen her past sins (p. 218). The Magdalen leaves, saying "J'en quicte la mondanite" as she removes her worldly clothes and goes in a simple garment to tell Martha of her conversion (p. 218).

Jean Michel does not emphasize the converted Magdalen's closeness to the Christ, but in the dramatization of the resurrection of Lazarus, he implies a closeness between Jesus and the Magdalen by having the Christ call specifically for the Magdalen when he goes to raise Lazarus from the grave.

⁶⁷Cohen, Le Théâtre en France, I, 68.

The Magdalen is also pictured walking alone near the "parcq" as she thinks of again anointing Jesus, this time at Simon "the Leper's" house (p. 258). After she anoints Jesus, John says that the house is full of the sweet smell of balms (p. 260), but Judas complains of the waste of money. Jesus defends the Magdalen and praises her for her love of him (p. 261).

Although the Magdalen is not given by Jean Michel extended laments for the Christ, she is, as in the Gospel of John's account of the resurrection of Christ, the first to whom the risen Christ appears, and she is sent by the Christ, whom she at first mistakes for the gardener, as an "apostle to the apostles" (p. 419).

It is the picture of the worldly Magdalen that links Jean Michel with the thirteenth-century Benediktbeuren playwright as well as with the Digby playwright, for the Magdalen is, in her mondanité, simultaneously a contemporary and an omnitemporal figure. Although she sings popular songs of her day and dresses in the fashion of the elegant ladies of her time, she retains an attribute of the archetypal feminine, the fascinating but dangerous seducer of men. Jean Michel's boldest innovation is, of course, his having the Magdalen try to seduce Jesus himself.

His audience must have delighted in the incongruity of the beautiful prostitute boldly eyeing the man-God Jesus as he preached of life eternal. And the French audience surely

experienced a special pleasure when their patron saint of perfume-manufacturers anointed the Christ's head with the fragrant l'eau de Damas. And viewing the Magdalen's repentance brought about by the very words of Jesus rather than by warnings from an angel, the audience must have been moved by the sudden weeping of the "belle Magdaleine," patron saint of reformed prostitutes, as she stood apart from the crowd.

The complex Magdalen's potentiality for rebirth is, then, differently treated by Jean Michel than by either the Benediktbeuren or the Digby playwright. The Magdalen in Michel's play does not pass through the "sleep of initiation" during which an angel warns her to change her way of life. Instead, Jean Michel's Magdalen, having rejected Martha's efforts to save her reputation is awake to the words of Jesus. She experiences internally and consciously the regret for her past life and the desire to forsake her mondanité, and though affected by the words of Jesus, the Magdalen makes her own choice for her "rebirth." No angel helps her, nor does any demon hinder her. Doctor Michel adds an extra dimension to the complex literary figure of the Magdalen; he gives her freedom of choice.

The worldly life of the Magdalen pictured in the drama inevitably appealed to the imaginations of artists. One fifteenth-century artist included in his illustrations for Eustache Marcade's Mystère de la Passion a representation

of the Magdalen, elegantly gowned and wearing a diadem atop her head with her long hair flowing on her shoulders.⁶⁴ Her gallant lover converses animatedly with her as the two of them move dancingly toward the bed in her chamber. The lover, akin to a Mephistopheles, has one arm around the Magdalen as he looks down at her and sweepingly gestures toward the bed, while the Magdalen, with her eyes downcast, touches her heart. A kitten sleeps curled on a rug in the foreground. The mood of the illustration is, like that of the worldly scenes in the drama, playfully comic, a bedroom joke in picture.

By dramatizing the Magdalen's worldly life and by isolating the Magdalen as the Mary closest to the Christ, playwrights had, then, expanded the literary figure and not only provided artists with an intriguing subject but also paved the way for the Digby heroine. Playwrights had, from the twelfth century on, recognized and represented something of the archetypal feminine present in the mythical Magdalen. Medieval playwrights had, as had the early writers of apocryphal works, used the Magdalen as a vessel for ideas that reflect an ambivalent view of woman.

The Digby playwright is, however, the first dramatist to use the life of the Magdalen as it had been set down by Jacobus a Voragine in the Legenda Aurea in the thirteenth

⁶⁴Illustration reproduced in Gustave Cohen's Le Théâtre en France au Moyen-Âge, I, plate XXVIII.

century. Other playwrights who dramatized the Passion and Resurrection of the Christ were not concerned with picturing the Magdalen's life after Christ's ascension. Because the Digby playwright is directly concerned with representing the Magdalen's long life, he draws material from the popular and often translated Legenda Aurea. The Golden Legend, first translated into English in 1450, was published by William Caxton in 1483. The Golden Legend's life of Saint Mary Magdalene not only provides the Digby playwright with material not used by other playwrights but also further demonstrates the continuity of early Magdalen traditions.⁶⁵

The Magdalen of The Golden Legend, like the Magdalen of the second-century Pistis Sophia, is "enlumined of perfect knowledge in thought" (Legend, p. 73), and like the Mariham of the Gospel of Mary, she is the woman whom Jesus "embraced" all in his love and "made right familiar with him" (Legend, p. 75). Like the Magdalen of the Pistis Sophia, "who is beautiful in her speaking," Mary Magdalene is "fair speaking," for, the Legend tells us, with her lips she had kissed the feet of "our Lord" (p. 76).

Like an ancient goddess, the Magdalen of the Legend brings about not only the queen's conception of a child but also, according to Jacobus, the conception of a son for the

⁶⁵References in this discussion are to The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton, ed. F. S. Ellis (London, 1900), IV, 72-89.

Duke of Burgundy, who had requested that the Magdalen's body be moved from Aix to Vézelay in A.D. 771 (p. 86). Like an Isis, she saves a woman with child from shipwreck, and like Christ himself, she restores the dead to life, for she resurrects not only the queen of Marseilles but also, the Legend reports, a knight who had been slain in battle (p. 87). The Magdalen of the Books of the Savior must have learned well the "mysteries" taught by Jesus to his "beloved" and to his brothers.

Although the Digby playwright draws from the Legend's life of the Magdalen, he does not slavishly follow it. He selects events and transforms them. He shows, for example, the Magdalen sent alone to Marseilles, while Jacobus tells of Maximian, Lazarus, Martha, Marcelle, and Saint Cedony being put to sea in a ship without a rudder and sailing, by God's grace, to Marseilles (p. 76). And although Jacobus includes the legend explaining the Magdalen's life of prostitution by saying that she was wed to John the Evangelist when Jesus called John to him, the Digby playwright does not choose to use it. The Digby heroine does, however, demonstrate Jacobus' statement that because "our Lord had taken (away) from her sovereign delight of the flesh, he replenished her with sovereign delight spiritual tofore all other, that is the love of God" (pp. 87-88).

The Digby playwright also chooses to allude to Jacobus' etymological explication of the Magdalen's name when he has

Jesus speak of the Magdalen's "bitter weeping" in her penitance. For "Mary" means "bitter," Jacobus says (p. 73). It also means, he says, "light," and in her contemplation, the Magdalen's face "shone like the rays of the sun" (p. 85), and she "spreads light abundantly" (p. 73). The Digby playwright has Lechery compare the Magdalen's "bemy of bewte" to the sun's rays, and he shows the Magdalen as a blinding light when she enters the queen's and king's chamber. She is called the Light, Jacobus says (p. 73), and she, like the Christ whom she hymns as the Light, becomes in the Digby play the light that "spreads abundantly."

Jacobus also includes the legend that we have seen in An Old English Martyrology and attributes it to Josephus. After Christ's ascension, the legend goes, the Magdalen had such a burning love for the Christ that she could not bear to look on any man and so went into the desert, at Aix, Jacobus says, to live alone for thirty years, and she was daily fed by angels (p. 85). The Digby playwright, we remember, has the Magdalen decide, after her mission to Marseilles is completed, to go to the desert to be "contemplatyff" and gain "spiritual strength." And in his picture of the Magdalen's hermit life he emphasizes both her love for the Christ and Christ's love for her. The Digby heroine, unlike the legendary saint, however, kisses the earth fervently as she dies.

The Magdalen of the Digby play retains more of the attributes given her during the early centuries of

Christianity than does any other medieval literary figure of the Magdalen. The Digby Magdalen, like the Pistis Sophia, has, as Jesus tells the Magdalen after her repentance, "an inward might that has purchased light from darkness." The Digby heroine, like the Pistis Sophia, forsakes the "mysteries of the intercourse" for the "mystery" of union with the divine. She is like the soul whose "journey through the Powers" the Magdalen describes in the Gospel of Mary, for she, like the soul, is saved from "a world in a world," because Jesus has rid her of the "Power's seven evils" so that in her the "kingdom of the flesh," "desire," and "ignorance" have come to an end. She is, as Jesus, in the Pistis Sophia, had told her she would be, "pure spirit," the "Pleroma of the Pleromas."

The Digby heroine, placed in a Western medieval setting, is, as she was in Eastern writings of the early Christian period, the Christian Athene, the goddess of wisdom, and she is also the goddess of the earth and of fertility, the Bride of the Song of Songs, Christ's "soror mea sponsa," an Isis as well as a seductive Aphrodite.

Just as the Digby playwright reveals the archetypal feminine present in the mythical Magdalen so do iconographic representations of the Magdalen reveal the figure's kinship with antique goddesses. A work which, I think, closely approximates the Digby playwright's picture of the complex Magdalen is a marble sculpture begun by Desidero da

Sattignano and completed after his death by his followers.⁶⁶

The sculpture stands in Santa Trinità in Florence, and like the Magdalen carved by Desidero's teacher, the fifteenth-century Donatello, the work represents the Magdalen as a hermit clothed in her long hair. Unlike Donatello's suffering shrunken penitent, however, the Santa Trinità Magdalen radiates a joyous beauty. Although her face is lined with age, her eyes sparkle as if they held a secret wisdom. With her lips slightly parted, she smiles. She holds in one hand her ointment jar. Her bare legs and arms are those of a graceful Venus, and a broad shining ribbon belts her long hair against her waist. The Santa Trinità Magdalen is at once as old as the Earth and as young as a new Spring.

The sculpture reveals, within the Christian hermit, the attributes of a goddess of wisdom and of love, the Great Mother who accepts her kinship with the earth. And the Magdalen of the marble sculpture is indeed an incarnation of the Great Earth Mother who is the "Mother of Stones."⁶⁷

In the Magdalen of the sculpture are united the woman "ful fayr and ful of femynyte," the "beryl of bewte" who delights in her worldly "valentyne," the penitent who

⁶⁶Photographs of the sculpture are on Plates 33 to 46 in The Magdalen and Sculptures in Relief, photographs by Clarence Kennedy. Studies in the History and Criticism of Sculpture (Northampton, Mass., 1929), Vol. VI

⁶⁷Erich Neumann in The Great Mother (p. 260) points out that the Earth Mother is, among other things, the mother of stones.

anoints the Christ with "precious bawmys" and wipes his feet with her hair "fayr and bright shynyng," the "sweet cypresse" who restores the queen of Marseilles to life on the "rock of ston," the "holy apostylesse" who preaches Christ's "Sermon on the Mount" to the people of Marseilles, the "repast contemplatyff" who lives thirty years as a hermit speaking only with the Christ and his angels, the earth goddess who kisses her earth fervently as she dies. The Santa Trinità marble sculpture is a plastic realization of the Digby playwright's complex heroine, the mythical Magdalen whose various attributes are united through the humanistic view of woman as a generative force.

"Beneath new attitudes, or mental sets," E. H. Gombrich aptly observes in Art and Illusion (p. 114), "the old ones survive and come to the surface in play and earnest."

CONCLUSION

THE MAGDALEN: A VESSEL FOR THE PARADOXICAL ARCHETYPAL FEMININE IN WESTERN LITERATURE

In this exploration of the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene sketched in the New Testament canonical gospels and of the effects of the myths on the literary figure of the Magdalen, I have emphasized the play element as it is manifested in the medieval dramatists' treatments of the literary figure. I am not, of course, the first to recognize the play element in medieval drama. V. A. Kolve, for example, in The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford, Calif., 1966), describes the purpose of the Corpus Christi play (p. 32): "A lie designed to tell the truth about reality, the drama was understood as significant play." Kolve also points out the "game and glee" present in the Digby Mary Magdalene. And Johan Huizinga in Homo Ludens emphasizes the play element that permeated the Middle Ages. "Medieval life," Huizinga says (p. 179), "was brimful of play."

I have also suggested that the play element contributed to the shaping of myths around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament, for I agree with Huizinga when he says

(Homo Ludens, p. 25): "In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-believe breaks down. The conception of play merges quite naturally with that of holiness." That the Magdalen was chosen to figure both as the "companion" of the Christ and as a vessel for the ambivalent view of woman reveals, I repeat, imaginations working on the borderline between jest and earnest in the attempt to preserve ideas too deep-rooted to be destroyed.

I also see in the ideas and figures in the apocryphal writings support for the hypotheses implicit in the Magdalen questions raised by the examination of the Digby heroine. That nothing grows from nothing and that man's imagination works through eclectic syncretism of the old in the creation of the new we can see in the results of the attempt to create a Christian literature during the early centuries of the Christian era.

In the attempt to create a new literature around the figure of the Christ, the writers of the apocrypha drew from the literary and legendary material about them. Not through any deliberate study and research but through the eclecticism inherent in the human imagination as it seeks to fulfill a desire for continuity, the writers of the apocrypha surrounded the Christ with figures bearing attributes of old Eastern deities and with ideas borrowed from antique religions and from Plato. And closest to the Christ, the early writers placed the Magdalen, a heroine who at once embodied dualistic ideas and attributes of antique goddesses.

We can, I think, safely conclude that had no myth been shaped around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels, there would never have been a Digby play Mary Magdalene. The Digby playwright's heroine is, except for her role with the other Marys who go to the tomb seeking Christ and except for her role as the first to whom the risen Christ appears, altogether mythical.

Through myths attached to the Magdalen during the early centuries of Christianity, the Digby heroine is a member of a family, a prostitute, the anointer of the Christ, the spiritual lover of the Christ, a "preacher," a "contemplative," a goddess of both wisdom and love, Christ's feminine counterpart. Through elaboration and localization of early myths during the complex twelfth century, the Digby heroine goes to Marseilles as "an holy apostylesse," converts the queen and king of Marseilles by bringing about the queen's conception of a child, preaches Christ's "Sermon on the Mount" to the people of Marseilles, goes as a hermit to a nearby wilderness, no doubt La Sainte-Baume, to gain spiritual strength by forsaking material food, and kisses the earth as she dies while her soul is taken to heaven amidst "mery song."

I doubt that the Digby playwright's figure of the Magdalen would have come into being had the prototype for the literary figure not been created in the East during the early centuries of Christianity and had not the Eastern traditions been carried to the West in the Middle Ages. We may idly ask

whether or not the Magdalen would have become a literary figure at all had the Alogi, who argued for the exclusion of John's gospel from the canon, triumphed. Certainly the good French wives would never have had a Saint Rabony to improve their "bad" husbands. And Magdalen iconography would have been the poorer, for the "Noli me tangere" scene has appealed to artists through the centuries.

I have assumed that John's recognition scene, with its suggestion of the archetypal earth goddess searching for the heaven god, is the probable inspiration for the early attempts to isolate the Magdalen as a feminine counterpart for the Christ. For the time being, I hold as a valid hypothesis the assumption that John's picture of the Magdalen's closeness to the Christ is of primary importance in bringing about the shaping of myths around the Magdalen rather than around any other New Testament figure.

But would Mark's simple statement that the risen Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom seven devils had been ejected, have sufficiently sparked imaginations to bring about the creation of the complex literary figure? Would the Magdalen have been identified as Christ's "companion" in early apocryphal writings? Would she have been the "pure spiritual Mariham, Mariham the happy," the Christian Athene of the Pistis Sophia? Would she have been a source of resentment for Peter?

I do not know what might have been, but I feel sure that imaginations would have sought to create a feminine

counterpart for the anthropomorphic Christ. And whoever that feminine figure may have been, to become a timeless literary figure, she would have had to embody the archetypal feminine: the dangerous but fascinating seducer of man, yet life's generative force, the goddess of wisdom and of love. For the archetypal feminine is, it seems to me, the necessary complement for the archetypal masculine hero, even if the hero is, as he sometimes is, envisioned as androgynous.

At any rate, myths did grow up around the Magdalen so that the literary figure came into being, and we can, I think, summarize both the methods of shaping the myths and the feelings that prompted the creation of the mythical Magdalen with an account of Jean Cousin's representation of the Magdalen. Dora and Erwin Panofsky, in Pandora's Box, the Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol (New York, 1965), give an account of Jean Cousin's transformation of his painting Eva Prima Pandora into a relief of the Magdalen. At the request of Guillaume Sotan, canon of Sens Cathedral, according to the Panofskys (p. 62, n. 13), Jean Cousin, in 1567, repeated, with slight changes, his painting Eva Prima Pandora to produce the representation of the Magdalen.

The painting, the Panofskys report (p. 62), shows a "beautiful nude reclining in front of shrubs, trees, and ruined masonry, which, forming a kind of arch, disclose the prospect of a river and an ancient city; and a tablet suspended across the arch bears the inscription: Eva Prima Pandora." On looking at the reproduction (Panofsky, ill. 29),

we see the woman's face in profile, her lips slightly parted, her eyes gazing beyond the picture's frame, her hair coiffed but leaving two strands free to caress her neck. One hand lifts nonchalantly the lid of the box, the other holds a leafy branch and rests on a skull. At the request of the canon, the nude Eva-Pandora is transformed into a decorously dressed Magdalen.

Eva, Pandora, the Magdalen--an Old Testament figure, a Greek mythological figure, a New Testament figure--are superimposed one on another, united in time. Eve-Pandora's box of evils becomes the Magdalen's jar of hope. Felix culpa incarnate. The archetypal feminine, with all its inherent paradox, is embodied in an Eve-Pandora-Magdalen.

The mythical Magdalen was created for a similar reason and in much the same way as the Eva Prima Pandora was transformed into the Magdalen. Not through historical perspective but through eclectic syncretism, characteristic of all human imagination which tries to satisfy the desire for continuity by absorbing the old into the new, the complex Magdalen came into being.

We have seen the mythical Magdalen taking shape during the early centuries of Christianity by viewing the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels and the other New Testament figures with whom she was early identified. We have seen the Magdalen become Christ's companion, the goddess of wisdom, in the Gospel of Mary and in the Pistis Sophia, and we have seen her, as the Christ's anointer,

in Origen's mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs, identified with the great earth goddess, the heaven-god's sister-bride.

By examining the creation of the prototype for the medieval figure of the Magdalen, I hope to have provided a basis for a deeper understanding of the complex Magdalen who reaches such prominence during the Middle Ages and who becomes the heroine of the fifteenth-century Digby play Mary Magdalene. For although the Magdalen of the Digby play has been categorized as a Christian penitent, or as a sinner, a disciple, a saint, she embodies, beyond these characteristics, as the sculptor Desidero da Sattignano well demonstrates, the archetypal feminine. And it is, I think, the early attribution to the Magdalen of elements of the complex archetypal feminine that makes the Magdalen a timeless figure, a figure who continues to live in twentieth-century literature.

Just as the writers of the early Christian period bequeathed to the Middle Ages the prototype for the literary figure, so the Middle Ages bequeathed to the twentieth century the literary figure of the Magdalen.

The preceding study has fulfilled its major purposes if it has heightened awareness both of the nature of the myths shaped around the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament canonical gospels and of the effects of the myths on the literary figure, particularly on the heroine of the Digby Mary Magdalene.

And I would like to believe that this brief study has enriched appreciation for the Magdalen who has in various ways figured in mankind's imagination for some two thousand years, for the Magdalen whose name is dropped by such differing writers as James Joyce, John Barth, Günter Grass, and Saul Bellow, all homo ludens, to connote the paradoxical archetypal feminine embodied in the mythical Magdalen.

Nikos Kazantzakis in his last work Report to Greco (New York, 1965, p. 228) exclaims: "O, I said to myself, if only man's heart were omnipotent, powerful enough to wrestle with death! If only it were like Mary Magdalene--Mary Magdalene the prostitute--and could resurrect the beloved corpse!"

Certainly a figure so long-lived, so vital as the Magdalen deserves, indeed demands, further study.

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