



"Woman, Why Weepest Thou?" Re-Visioning the Golden Age Magdalen

Author(s): Elizabeth B. Davis

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Hispania*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (Mar., 1993), pp. 38-48

Published by: [American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/344605>

Accessed: 04/03/2012 14:27

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Hispania*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

"Woman, Why Weepest Thou?" Re-visioning the Golden Age Magdalen

Elizabeth B. Davis
The University of Oregon

To Alberto Sandoval

Abstract: This study examines Mary Magdalen's biblical identity and poetic representation in selected sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish texts. An alternative reading or "re-visioning" (Adrienne Rich's term) of the narratives that tell her story reclaims her figure from masculinist characterizations of the Magdalen that have made an enduring impact on Western culture. The representative texts are by Quevedo, Lope de Vega, Cristóbal de Mesa, the Marqués de Berlanga, Diego de Hojeda, and Sor María de Santo Domingo. While most of these narratives show a thoroughly conventional portrait of Mary Magdalen, others offer partially dissenting views that subvert the dominant representation of the female figure.

Key Words: Golden Age narrative poetry, woman as subject, Quevedo, Vega Carpio (Lope Félix de), Mesa (Cristóbal de), Berlanga (Marqués de), Hojeda (Diego de), Santo Domingo (Sor María de).

Since the writings of the Church Fathers, the image of Mary Magdalen has embodied a contradiction between eros and ascesis, Eve and the Virgin Mary (Hufstader 32; Malvern 57–58). The woman from Magdala simultaneously evokes ardent sensuality and the renunciation of sexual love in favor of an active apostolic life, even though writers who wish to honor her memory emphasize or minimize these two sides of her personality to widely varying degrees. The object of this study is to consider the figure of Mary Magdalen as she is portrayed in a selection of Golden Age texts. These pages attempt to subject the Golden Age Magdalen, as a masculine-created literary myth with misogynist overtones, to an alternative re-visioning, in the sense in which Adrienne Rich used this term.

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.... We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (Rich 35)

Mary Magdalen appears frequently in Golden Age writings on the Passion of Christ,

and often in *cancionero*-type poems dedicated to her. This study, however, focuses on longer texts that narrate her story or invoke the centrality of her role. All of them depict the Magdalen weeping, though the motivation for her tears varies. These works are seldom read in our time, although two of them are by well-known writers of the Golden Age (Quevedo and Lope de Vega). Four are narrative poems of no more than 100 octaves that recount Mary's life prior to her repentance as well as her ascetic life afterward. The text of Diego de Hojeda, on the other hand, is an epic poem on the passion of Christ in which Mary Magdalen figures prominently as a woman of extraordinary strength. Although the obvious inspiration of Sor María de Santo Domingo's text is spiritual rather than literary, it illustrates the constant interplay between the attitudes of popular piety in Golden Age life and the clearly literary representations of the Mary Magdalen figure.

The Magdalenic figure evidenced in the dominant discourse of the Golden Age is a poetic version of what contemporary theologians referred to as the "one Magdalen," that is, an elaborate fictionalization containing at least three New Testament women (Hufstader 32-33). From Mary of Magdala, whom Jesus exorcised of seven devils (Luke 8: 2), the

figure receives her name. To her belongs the honor of witnessing the resurrection (John 20: 10-18). Her fame as a repentant prostitute comes from attaching to this figure the combined identities of the unnamed sinner who bathed Jesus's feet with her tears (Luke 7: 36-50) and the woman that anointed Christ's feet at Bethany (Matt. 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9). Further, one of the Gospels gives Mary a family by identifying the anointing female as Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and of Martha (John 12: 3-8). In some cases the figure contains apocryphal elements as well, although these are notably few in Spanish works of the period. Thus prevalent poetic discourse in the Golden Age does not make of Mary Magdalen a bride for Jesus, yet this notion was popular in the Magdalenic legends and has surfaced recently in works such as Nikos Kazantzakis's *Last Temptation of Christ* and Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*.¹ Spanish poets of the time occasionally allude to Mary's apostolate in Provence where, following Jacobus de Voragine's account, she restored the king and queen of Marseille to fertility and preserved them during a shipwreck (*The Golden Legend* 355-64). This mythical Magdalen's legend closes on a gaunt female figure dwelling in a hermit's cave near Sainte-Baume dressed in sackcloth and sustained on spiritual food given her by angels.² Although several texts capsule the final ascetic phase of Mary's life, as the object of official Golden Age discourse, Mary Magdalen usually emerges as a specific concretization of male desire (Cruz 206), a woman less remembered for her apostolic role than for her tears and perfumed hair.

The Repentant Magdalen

Although Golden Age renderings of the Magdalen tend to identify her uniformly in this way, they differ rather significantly in emphasis. All the variations on the Magdalenic theme, however, have in common the initial episode that serves as the foundation for the "tears of repentance" tradition, the scene in which Mary, by lowering herself to Christ's feet, rises to new life and moral stature.³ The following sonnet of Quevedo ("*A la Magdalena*") is typical. Alluding to Mary's ultimate

salvation but foregrounding her pose as a repentant harlot, Quevedo focuses only on the kneeling figure of the contrite woman and on the act of forgiveness, using the latter to expose the uncontainable greed of the *boticarios*:

Llegó a los pies de Cristo Madalena,
de todo su vivir arrepentida,
y viéndole a la mesa, enternecida,
lágrimas derramó en copiosa vena.

Soltó del oro crespo la melena
con orden natural entretejida,
y deseosa de alcanzar la Vida,
con lágrimas bañó su faz serena.

Con un vaso de unguento, los sagrados
pies de Jesús ungió, y El, diligente,
la perdonó (por paga) sus pecados.

Y pues aqueste ejemplo veis presente,
¡albricias, boticarios desdichados,
que hoy da la Gloria Cristo por unguente!
(Quevedo 373)

Although this sonnet transgresses the "literature of tears" paradigm, as I have elsewhere suggested ("Hagiographic" 315-22), it still provides a microcosmic view of the conversion scene as it is constructed in traditional repentance texts. The building blocks are the Magdalen's tears, her hair, her ointment jar, her kneeling body, and not least, the feet of Christ. In the texts that concern us here these poetic objects act as vehicles necessary to the crossing-over of a boundary separating old life from new, inferior from superior love. Tears, hair, ointment and feet are variously mixed to assemble Mary Magdalen's narrative.

The tears of the Magdalen are to be understood as the most perfect confession: according to the "literature of tears" tradition that sprang up throughout Europe during the Counter Reformation after the Council of Trent, Mary's tears are the external sign of her inner state. The idea is medieval, in fact. In *El libro de buen amor*, Juan Ruiz discusses the relative value of contrition and penitence (strophes 1141-42). The examples he uses are Mary Magdalen and Saint Peter, whose tears are said to be "signos exteriores" of their contrition. Mary's tears are held to be the consummate expression of sorrow and the will to remake her life. This Golden Age literary

enthusiasm for tears finds an interesting echo in twentieth-century feminist theory. Julia Kristeva has argued that milk and tears are both “metaphors of non-language, of a ‘semiotic’ that does not coincide with linguistic communication” (*Stabat Mater* 109). In their ability to elicit the repressed, to privilege the nonverbal and draw close to the “primary processes,” tears—which Kristeva associates with the *Mater dolorosa* and with human suffering, generally—are infinitely more potent than words. But though Kristeva here speaks only of women’s tears, in the literature of the Golden Age this lachrymose power was not gender specific. Poems on the tears of Saint Peter and of other male saints abound in Europe at this time, and contemporary Spanish devotional books recommend the salutary effects of crying to all who want to draw close to God in prayer.⁴ An important consequence of this is that Mary Magdalen’s tears, far from being a sign of female manipulation in accordance with misogynist tradition, are an outward symptom of inner grace aspired to by men, as well. Thus it is that in Lope de Vega’s *Las lágrimas de la Madalena*, the male poetic speaker states his intention to model his own tears on Magdalen’s, even as he encourages a woman named “Filida” to do likewise.

Mary’s hair is the chosen instrument for wiping Christ’s feet but, ironically, in many of these texts it is also a weapon of sexual assault: the words “lazos” and “redes” are used repeatedly to suggest how Magdalen has ensnared men with her locks, and how she uses them even now to entrap the feet of Jesus (the entrapment is particularly elaborate in the verses of Lope de Vega). But this misogynist valuation of Mary’s “lazos” is complicated by a textual insistence that when she “captures” Christ in this way, she herself becomes “entangled,” and thereby—paradoxically—freed forever. In all but Sor María de Santo Domingo’s text, the hair binding the two figures together constitutes a metaphor for Mary’s voluntary subservience that is received as natural and positive by all but the most “resisting” reader; the words “súbdita, sierva, esclava” explicitly denote this condition in Cristóbal de Mesa’s text. The important point here is not, I believe, that Mary assumes a

subordinate role to Christ (after all, the twelve apostles did the same thing), but that since both Mary and Jesus are equally “chained” in this new arrangement, the simple subject/object relationship breaks down. This suggests that, like her tears, Magdalen’s hair is a complex poetic object.

Mary Magdalen, the revered “anointer of the Anointed,” is represented in medieval iconography by her ointment jar. However, for various reasons, this jar is also a suggestive sign of the erotic. First of all, its contents connote sensuality in their own right: Quevedo’s Mary massages the precious balm into the “sacred feet” while simultaneously covering them with kisses. But equally evocative is the mythological subtext of these lines: as mentioned above, Mary Magdalen is a “type” of Eve and through the latter, a reincarnation of the pagan Pandora. Her ointment jar is unmistakably reminiscent of Pandora’s “box” and its woeful contents, unleashed on the world by the woman as part of Zeus’s plan to punish Prometheus for stealing fire.⁵ Quevedo’s text summons the bittersweet, unambiguously erotic resonances of those mythical “temptresses,” even if they are ultimately made less threatening by a male text that shows Mary vanquished by the loving presence of Jesus.

The Magdalen’s physical position at the feet of Christ is a prototypical posture of female submission, this statement with two caveats. The first is that in Quevedo’s text and elsewhere, the humbling of Mary becomes the cornerstone for her elevation to the status of Christ’s companion and apostle. Or, as Lope de Vega puts it, “El modo de subir es descendiendo” (Vega Carpio 90).⁶ This notion, that the way up is down, is very common in sixteenth-century religious verse and is probably a carryover from the *conceptismo* of the fifteenth-century *cancionero*. In this context, it is difficult to dismiss the kneeling position of Mary as nothing more than a projection of male desire. Men and women alike strove to humble themselves: indeed, “descending” in order to rise again in Christ remains an organizing principle of the monastic life.

The second caveat is that Mary, herself, initiates the action in the traditional story of her conversion, though Quevedo’s sonnet

omits any acknowledgment of that fact. Unconstrained, she searches Jesus out and kneels at his feet. To see Mary Magdalen *as subject* is to recognize a crucial side of the mythical figure that nullifies to some extent her typological relationship to both Eve and the Virgin Mary: the Magdalen has a life, *a personal history*, a past that though tainted is hers. This is a woman who has family ties but also a story of her own, a figure whose life is marked by passion rather than passivity, who repents at the feet of Jesus not out of coercion but by choice, who ministers to Christ out of a new and selfless kind of love and becomes his close companion, who finally is chosen to carry the news of his resurrection, even consecrating herself to the hardest monastic life. All of these attributes place Mary Magdalen outside the simple polar opposites of the traditional Eva/Ave antinomy: her rich life as a woman separates her from other female figures that play a mediating role between humans and the divinity, such as the Virgin and various saints, figures that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar associate with the “Eternal Feminine” (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 21). Mary’s human past and her self-determination surely help to explain her abiding appeal to readers of the twentieth century.

Cristóbal de Mesa’s *Llanto de la Magdalena*

Other conversion narratives reveal a diversity of possible meanings that disclose both the representational limitations of these Golden Age texts and the terms on which modern readers can reclaim the woman of Magdala from their verses. A rigid binary vision informs Cristóbal de Mesa’s *Llanto de la Magdalena*, a narrative poem composed of 58 royal octaves. The work has more to say about Mary’s life before her repentance than other Spanish texts on the conversion. Mesa depicts the early Mary Magdalen as a kind of seventeenth-century courtesan and sybarite:

Es mortal enemiga de retretes,
amiga de música y ventana
de paseos, de coplas, de billetes,
de salir siempre a fiestas muy galana:
de verdegados, rizos y copetes,
de andar bizarra en público, y profana,

de nuevos usos, de costosos trajes,
y de conversaciones, y mensajes.⁷

She is lively, economically comfortable and bent on doing as she pleases. In subsequent verses, her sister Martha comes to visit her, criticizes her for receiving all sorts of men into her home, and tells her about a preacher of great renown: his name is Jesus and he has “el cuerpo lindo, el rostro de una dama” (10). Martha’s description of his “buen talle” piques Mary’s curiosity and she decides to go see the man. His sermon, however, sets her heart on fire; she, like the Bride in the Song of Songs, wanders around like a “wounded deer” searching for him. When she finds Christ again at the house of the Pharisee, she throws herself before him (“ante él se prostra”), receives his forgiveness, and only then washes his feet with her tears, using two locks of her hair to wipe them dry (21).

Having first represented Magdalena as a frivolous woman without substance, Mesa now avails himself of his authorial prerogative to redeem her image by making her the “Ensign” of Jesus’s cross and an ascetic of larger-than-life proportions. The reformed Mary turns against her body with almost excessive gusto:

Y aquella que antes era tan amiga
del cuerpo, y del espíritu contraria,
era después de sí tan enemiga,
y tan de aquella antigua opinión varia:
que como contra sí haciendo liga,
tomaba una venganza extraordinaria,
con cruel novedad de su persona,
como quien al martirio se abandona. (Mesa 26)

At this point Mary gains a voice to condemn her past and announce her new love, thus constituting a subjectivity that is at once self-deprecating and optimistic:

Qué secreta virtud, qué nueva forma
Haze mi inclinación tan diferente,
Mas noble amor me muda y me transforma,
Que otro amor en el alma no consiente:
Amor me descompuso, él me reforma,
Uno me hizo loca, otro prudente,
Uno es puro y honesto, otro lacivo,
Salutífero aqueste, aquel nocivo.

El nuevo casto amor que agora tomo,
Que solo precio y amo, estimo [y] adoro,
No tira flechas de odio e[m]buelto en plomo,

Ni hiere el corazón con puntas de oro:
 Por otro amor más alto demás tomo,
 Son las ardientes lágrimas que lloro,
Y lloro más, porque lloré gran tiempo,
Por falso amor, de falso passatiempo.
 (Mesa 29-30, emphasis mine)

She then apostrophizes the very parts of her body that are always highlighted in the traditional conversion scene: she tells her eyes to cry themselves blind, her hair that had captivated so many men must now be dragged along the ground, her body that was a "temple of error" shall be mortified seven times over with a hairshirt (34-38). It is fairly easy to see, therefore, how the new woman is quite literally the converse of the old: what was her voluptuous body can now restore her to moral health through penitence and ascesis. The procedure is consistent with the rhetoric of conversion texts that use allusion, parody and caricature to recodify the old in the new. In this case, the "superior" (reasonable) term replaces the "inferior" (sensual) term, while at the same time the old sensuous parts carry over into the new life that they may be purged and denied. Thus one may speak, with Malvern, of a paradoxical "erotic asceticism" that "lives on in the mythical Magdalen." (65)

In Cristóbal de Mesa's poem this Magdalena, like a boat "en mar amargo" comes to port at the feet of Christ. She becomes the most avid of his followers. At the arrest and trial, when the twelve abandoned him, she, "con ínclito valor y ánimo fuerte, / jamás desamparó los pies amados" (44). This representation of the metamorphosed Magdalen as "Alférez de la Real bandera, De la Cruz" is analogous to the masculinization she undergoes in certain Gnostic writings as a way of rescuing her from the misogynist values otherwise prevalent in these texts (Malvern 37). Mesa makes Mary present at the crucifixion but, on the other hand, does not allow her to witness the resurrection. Similarly, her role as preacher receives a perfunctory mention (one octave), in contrast to the ample treatment accorded her youthful debauchery and later penance. Mesa does, however, include Magdalen's voyage to Marseille and her withdrawal to the solitude of a dark cave. Her life here is marked by extreme asceticism (fast-

ing, abstinence, lack of sleep), but she rises into the air every day for angelic sustenance. The text ends with the speaker's plea for the intercession of this "pecadora, penitente y santa."

What view of woman is promoted in this extraordinarily corrective presentation of Mary's conversion? The second half of the text is presumably intended as an antidote to the first half, but the balance achieved through this resolution overlooks the fact that whether Magdalen lives in vice or virtue, her destiny is always the same: to weep for love of men. It is not the same, of course, to cry over the disappointments of human love affairs as to shed powerful tears of repentance and transformation, but in Mesa's account, Mary's tears are almost her only function. The overstated symmetry of the two parts of his text suggests the restoration of order in his tidy version of Mary Magdalen's story. The poet has created disorder to manage and domesticate it but marks the opposing parts of the woman's life with the same sign: her tears. Since Mesa emphasizes these tears of pain and love at the expense of Mary's apostolic role, her tearfulness, instead of separating the new from the old, has the effect of blurring the distinction between the prostitute and the saint. The Magdalen's ubiquitous tears thus seem to undermine the fundamental intentionality of the text, which attempts to place the ascetic woman in juxtaposition to her former lascivious self.

Lope de Vega's *Las lágrimas de la Magdalena*

Lope de Vega's *Las lágrimas de la Magdalena* (1614), a narrative composed of 100 royal octaves, is a very different text from that of Mesa, considerably longer, and classicistic in tone. Lope's narrative poem uses a type of anachrony Genette ascribes to epic (231). Indeed, the narrative is temporally structured through Mary's memory and premonitions, in which Magdalena denounces her past and foretells her future. All of this creates an ironic situation in that Lope's Magdalen is in some ways no more than a foil for Christ. However, because she narrates the better part of the story, we experience a strong sense of her subjectivity which is quite unusual among Spanish repentance texts of this type.

In Lope's poem the story of Mary's conversion is completely overshadowed by a poetic account of Palm Sunday and the crucifixion; indeed, the narrative is more about divine atonement than about Mary Magdalen, whom the reader sees walking the *via crucis*, weeping, because to her it seemed Christ "sólo por sus culpas padecía" (192). Lope's baroque Madalena is truly a late incarnation of Eve whose primordial purpose is to reveal the meaning of Christ's crucifixion. Thus Mary, when she first arrives at Golgotha, imagines herself on the cross dying to prepare the way for Jesus ("Primero voy sus brazos ocupando / con el afecto y el dolor que nuestro, / de suerte que presume el sentimiento / que va delante a haceros aposento." [293-96]) but later accepts the necessity of his death for the salvation of humanity ("Mas no, mi bien, amor me desatina; / id a morir para que viva el hombre..." [329-30]).

A very significant part of Magdalen's monologue is spoken at the foot of the cross. Here, her words foreshadow her own ascetic life and hermitage:

Yo lloraré por montes solitarios,
mi amor, mi bien y mi querido Esposo,
las varias telas, los vestidos varios,
que adornaron mi cuerpo y rostro hermoso,
techos de oro de Ofir, mármoles parios
por pavimento cándido y lustroso,
tapices palestinos o damascos,
serán de hoy más los frigiditos peñascos.
(Vega Carpio 441-49)

Imagining herself already in that state, she curses the "afeites," "ungüentos" and "pinturas" she had previously used to accentuate her natural beauty, and promises to exchange portraits of her lovers for an image of Christ and of her own approaching death. When Jesus complains of thirst, Mary offers him her tears to drink. But in order for them to reach his mouth, she explains that she will have to "cry upwards." She offers her tears as a "bridge" that spans the abyss separating earth (where Mary is kneeling) from heaven (Christ positioned above her on the cross), much the same way that the descending ladder is a metaphor to explain the mystery of the Incarnation. Lope's text shows that tears have the power to "conquer the heavens" because they

exemplify the repentant way in which humans are supposed to live. By making Mary Magdalen witness the resurrection, Lope de Vega grants her the supreme moment, denied her by Quevedo and by Cristóbal de Mesa. When she tells the disciples that the tomb is empty, they decide to go see for themselves; only then do they begin to believe (705-08).

What is original about Lope's variation on the "tears" theme is first of all the priority accorded to Mary Magdalen throughout the poem; *her* voice, her memory and her vision compose the universe of the text, even though its subject matter is something else: the passion and resurrection of Christ. Second, Lope's text insists on the power of tears to communicate with and even nurture the divine. Lope's Magdalen cries her tears toward heaven not just as a "non-language," but to quench the thirst of the divine. Finally, Lope leaves nothing out of the mythical Magdalen's story except the bits that may be traced to apocryphal sources: she sees the empty tomb and enjoys the moment of recognition when Jesus calls her by her name. This particular representation of Mary Magdalen gives her great stature.

Berlanga's *Lágrimas de la Magdalena*

The text of the Marqués de Berlanga, *Lágrimas de la Magdalena* (1613), offers an image of Mary that is far more lethal than any heretofore mentioned. Rather than fun-loving, like Cristóbal de Mesa's Mary, she is deadly. And if Mesa made crying Mary's primary occupation, Berlanga gives her no other priority than trapping men in the snare of her physical charms. For this daily enterprise she primps in front of a mirror, rejoicing in the spectacle of her own body adorned with fine, sensuous cloth and cosmetics, perfumes, and so on:

Ni el cauteloso lazo con que prende
Al pajarillo simple, así prepara
El cazador astuto, cuando entiende
Que viene el alba transparente y clara,
Como el amigo espejo, a do se enciende
En fuego el corazón de ver su cara,
Lazos, arma de amor, redes tendía
La solícita industria de María. (Berlanga 36)

Preparing for the hunt is the central metaphor in this passage, where Mary is a Narcissus figure that almost falls in love with her own beauty as she gazes at her image. When she walks down the street, she leaves carnage ("destrozos") in her path. Her sister Martha pleads with her to think of her reputation and even her health. The "lazos" motif mentioned earlier appears here with an interesting variation. Martha tells Mary that Christ is the only one who can "unravel" her from this entanglement: "Sólo, hermana, será quien desenrede / Tus lazos ciegos y tu error contraste, / Aquel esclarecido amigo nuestro, / Poderoso Señor y gran maestro" (38). Mary simply responds that there is a time for everything, and that in her youth she intends to enjoy life:

Dulce hermana, le dice, ¿a ley tan dura
Quiéres atar la edad que está florida,
Y marchitar tan presto la verdura
Que apenas brota en mi temprana vida?
(Berlanga 41)

The impetus for Mary's transformation does not seem to come from outside her. Berlanga's Magdalen, unlike the others previously cited, is seized by a strange malaise that leads her to question her own assumptions and seems to prepare her for a conversion experience:

Por lentos pasos a sentir empieza
El corazón confuso de María,
Un temblor que de pies a la cabeza
Y por todos sus huesos discurría.
Mírase desde el alma a la nobleza,
Y ve que en ambas partes se perdía:
Considera de Cristo los milagros,
Sus glorias tristes, sus placeres agros.

Así del agitado pensamiento
Soberbias olas de temor levanta,
Y a fuerza de tormenta y de tormento
Su barquilla se anega y se quebranta.
Ya se retira sola a su aposento,
Ya suspira, ya gime, ya se espanta:
Luchan el cielo y tierra en su memoria,
Mas ya se inclina al cielo la victoria.
(Berlanga 47)

What finally convinces Mary, however, is an epiphany: an angel in the guise of Magdalen's mother appears to her, shaking her out of her sinful stupor. Remembering Martha's advice to go to Jesus, Mary searches him out. Never

looking at him, she washes his feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. Berlanga invokes the "descend to ascend" topos seen earlier when he tells us that Magdalen "climbs" the golden ladder of her hair in order to steal the jewel at the feet of Christ (63). She then rises, forgiven, and the text of the Marqués de Berlanga ends, abruptly.

It is interesting to note that it is the three female figures who speak in this poem, each one interrupting the narrative for several stanzas at a time. And although it is true that Mary seems to be in control of her destiny in this text, in the sense that *she decides* what her course of action will be, it is also true that this is an outstandingly blatant misogynist representation of her. This Magdalen does not love men. She loves to use them and be loved by them. The unrelenting masculinist ideology underlying this representation goes uncontested because, after the conversion scene, the text simply halts: there is no mention of Mary's role at the resurrection, none, either, of her apostolate, nor do we see her living out her penitence. And though she is more interesting than some of the other Magdalens represented in Golden Age texts because of the tormented psychological state that precedes the great change in her life, there does not seem to be much in the Marqués de Berlanga's text to redeem her.

Other Conversion Narratives

Fray Diego de Hojeda has included a remarkably sympathetic representation of Mary Magdalen in his epic poem on Christ's passion entitled *La Christiada* (Sevilla, 1611). Hojeda seems to have had a special reverence for the Magdalen. A Dominican missionary to Perú, he was one of the founders of the Convent of Santa María Magdalena in Lima in 1606. Indeed, it was probably within the walls of this convent that he composed *La Christiada* (Intro. to *LC*, xxvii).

The portrait of Mary Magdalen seems conventional at first. When Pilate's wife asks for information about Jesus, an unknown Samaritan woman narrates Christ's encounters with three women: the biblical Samaritan to whom Jesus offered "living water," the adulteress

whose life he saved, and Mary of Magdala, depicted in her traditional role as repentant sinner. In agreement with the previous texts, this one states that Magdalena went to hear Jesus preach “no por Dios, sino por ombre.” The conversion scene generally follows the lines seen above.

“A sus espaldas y a sus pies se puso,
Y començó a lavar sus pies beninos
Con un ardiente amor del cielo infuso,
Y con ríos de lágrimas divinos:
Su peinado cabello descompuso,
Haziendo mil prudentes desatinos;
Y bolvió sus cabellos en toallas,
Para, en vertiendo lágrimas, limpiallas.

“Vertiólas de sus ojos, y limpiólas
Con sus cabellos y sus blancas manos;
Mas no dió de su amor las muestras solas,
Qual los amantes suelen dar profanos:
Con hechos las juntó, y acompañaólas
Con exemplos de vida más que umanos;
Agora vive y vivirá su fama
Mientras queme el calor y arda la llama.”⁸

These strophes, taken from a text vaster than any analyzed in this study, compress much information into a brief space. The heat of Magdalen’s face and the cool water she cries contrast vividly in these lines. Mary bathes the feet of Jesus and uses her hair to dry them, even as she dries her own tears. The principal difference between the previous texts and this one is that Hojeda, through the Samaritan woman, tells us right off that deeds followed close upon these tears.

The last lines allude to the words Jesus spoke in defense of the nameless woman who anointed him at Bethany: “I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Matt. 26: 6-13). This unknown woman’s identity merged centuries ago with that of Mary Magdalen, as mentioned earlier. By including it in the octaves cited, Hojeda effectively links the repentant woman and the preacher who promotes the gospel “throughout the world,” even as Hojeda saw himself doing in Viceroyal Perú. All of this anticipates the important treatment Hojeda gives to the Magdalenic figure in the crucifixion and resurrection scenes (Books 12 and 6, respectively), where Mary’s role as witness to the resurrection is highlighted (Davis,

“Politics”). In the last lines of the poem, Mary Magdalen kisses the feet of the dead Christ before he is laid in the tomb. Her place in *La Christiada* is, therefore, absolutely central, binding together the plot line of the passion and its consequence, the resurrection and future of the Church.

Such a favorable representation of Magdalen begs the question of whether a woman writer of the period would treat Mary Magdalen differently. A little-known text in prose, the *Libro de la oración* of Sor María de Santo Domingo (circa 1518) provides a view that echoes some concerns in common with the earlier-mentioned texts, even while its perspective seems slightly different. Sor María’s “*Contemplation while Enraptured on Easter Sunday*,” as its title suggests, was not penned by her, but rather by an amanuensis in the room when she uttered the words. An aspect of Sor María’s treatment of Mary Magdalen that is neatly skirted by nearly all the male-authored texts seen thus far is the question of whether or not Mary could be believed by Peter and John when she told them of the resurrection.

Sor María’s evocative words place her listeners at the side of Mary and the two apostles as they run to the tomb on Easter morning only to find it empty:

Y con qué fuerça corrian los dos y corriendo más el querido del Señor no creyendo ni descreyendo del todo, mas vacillando con la flaqueza y con el vestigio de fe y con el amor que le quedaba... Ved a ellos alegres y tristes dudosos y no dudando dello: alégranse porque lo querrian, y entristécense diziendo, ¿Cómo certificaremos a los de dura cerviz, que él es ya fuera de sus manos? ¿Cómo, siendo ellos tan duros, seremos nosotros creydos? ¿Diziéndoles que lo sabemos (porque unas mujeres nos lo dixeron) si no tenemos para esto firmeza mayor de certificárgeles?⁹

The matter of requiring “stronger proof” than the word of a woman leads Sor María to confront the problem of the equality of the sexes directly:

¿O hermana y tú por qué te entristeces entre ellos pues están todos alegres? ¿Entristécete porque no te creyeron? Mira, pues, que aunque le vieron no han de quedar con el crédito ellos. Tú te gozas de tu consolación con su vista (no te acordando del testimonio que es menester de como fue levantado) y ellos alégranse con

él, y con el amor que le tienen.... ¿Y qué testimonio fuera para con estos endurecidos decir "levantado es"? Y diziendo ellos como lo sabeys, ¿qué les rindiera: "Sabémoslo porque unas mujeres nos lo dijeron"? Y aunque en los espíritus sean yguales la mujer y el varón, en lo natural es más fuerte el varón a la vista de los naturales. Y por esso para lo certificar a los otros y para osar morir ellos sobre ello, mayor testimonio era menester que verle levantado solamente mujeres. (María de Santo Domingo, n. pag.)

The issue of woman's credibility is central to Sor María's text, yet it does not appear in any of the "literature of tears" poems except that of Lope de Vega, and there only indirectly. Lope's Peter and John hear Magdalen's story, run to the tomb, and only once they are inside and find Christ's shroud do they believe (Vega Carpio 705-12). Sor María discusses Mary Magdalen's penitence and her tears earlier in the contemplation, but nowhere in her rapture can the perfumed hair and the fancy clothes be found. She does not even mention the conversion scene, concentrating all her attention instead on the resurrection and Mary's role in it. Calling Magdalen "sister," she appeals to her not to be sad that the disciples do not believe her, using the stubbornness of the unconverted as justification for the requirement of well-certified proof. She emphasizes the lengths to which Christians must go to defend the reality of the resurrection; if people must be willing to die for it, then the apostles need to certify its truth beyond all doubt. Sor María had her own skirmishes with Church authorities. Accused of feigning raptures and of dressing provocatively, among other things, she emerged unscathed from four different examinations by them (Giles 7-20). Her text poses the problem of the relationship between male correlative religionists and the rare woman who has been elevated into a position of Church leadership. Sor María's enraptured speech suggests the hurt she felt when her own words were met with skepticism on the part of male clerics. In this context, it appears that her strong identification with Mary Magdalen, called Christ's "beloved" in this Easter Sunday contemplation, is established more on the basis of gender difference than on an affinity with Magdalen's conversion experience.

The Re-visioned Magdalen

Although this account of selected views of Magdalen in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain may convey the impression that the amalgamated, legendary figure of the repentant harlot went unchallenged for centuries, the truth is that even as Golden Age poets were shaping their rather homogeneous representation, attempts were underway throughout the Continent to "deconstruct" the myth of the "one Magdalen." There was a major challenge to her authority from within humanist theological ranks in sixteenth century France. In 1518, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples published a treatise (*De Maria Magdalena*) defending the separateness of the three Marys to keep the image of the contemplative sister of Martha free of guilt by association with the unnamed sinner of Luke 7 (Hufstader 57). His tract unleashed such controversy that Lefèvre d'Étaples was eventually censured by the Paris faculty of theology and forced to abandon his views (Hufstader 39). Marcel Bataillon seems to suggest that in Spain, support for the separation of the three Marys was likely restricted to Erasmian circles; the hegemonic view was that of the "one Magdalen," newly defended in 1521 by the Spanish Dominican Balthasar Sorio (qtd. by Hufstader 40). Certainly none of the texts examined here shows any evidence that the idea of separating the three Marys had currency in Spain during this period.

Challenges to the image of the "one Magdalen" did not end with the failed campaign on the part of male theologians to dislodge the amalgamated figure. Such a movement is current among feminist theologians and historians who would cut away the accretions of centuries to find the actual Mary Magdalen who appears in the Gospels. In what could be called a "second deconstruction," Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others have tried to separate the three Marys again. That accomplished, what remains is a figure that Rachel Conrad Wahlberg calls "one of the most maligned women in the New Testament" (58): a woman from Magdala that Jesus exorcised, who was to become the key witness to the resurrection.

In reappraising the figure of Mary Magdalen, "gynobiblicist scholarship" (Fuchs) has

reaped uneven benefits. On the positive side, the separation of the three Marys affords us the opportunity to read such texts as those of Mesa or Lope as elaborations of a myth grounded in a specific, masculinist belief system. We then readily perceive the interest male theologians and preachers might have had in perpetuating the weepy Mary whose value as *exemplum* they found indispensable. On the negative side, stripping all apocryphal elements from the figure leaves a somewhat elusive Mary Magdalen. For if the Mary that emerges from the Synoptic Gospels enjoys one glorious moment on Easter morning, her subsequent eclipse is nearly total. She is denigrated by the disciples who invalidate what is most hers, the ability to express her truth through language. Then she disappears. What is lost in reaffirming the Gospel truth, a “truth” that is not so simple, as we have seen, is the Magdalen that is most loved and most justifiably appreciated by women and men alike: the complex figure detailed in this study. Although one could argue that patriarchal ideology is “re-stabilized” (Sandoval 65) when the stray Mary is brought back into the fold, the deconstruction of the “one Magdalen” assumes that we must also relinquish the possibility of any alternative reading of the mythical woman.

Re-visioning” Mary Magdalen is proposition that reaches beyond questions of biblical authority into the larger cultural issues posed by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts analyzed here. To see Magdalen “with fresh eyes,” to use Rich’s phrase, turns the reader into a conscious co-creator of myth who can choose to emphasize the qualities of spiritedness and openness to change. This is the least reductionist way for twentieth-century readers to view Mary Magdalen in their own terms: as a woman whose life is marked by both transformation and intentionality. This Mary might find the tearful Golden Age Magdalen off-center. My guess is that she would gently prod her older sister into prayerful action.

■ NOTES

¹ Kazantzakis makes Mary and Jesus childhood sweethearts in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Mary

Magdalen turns to a life of prostitution when, at the festival in Cana, Jesus turns away from her in order to accomplish his heavenly father’s work (42). Umberto Eco has Jesus and Mary Magdalen unite in marriage at the dinner at Cana in *Foucault’s Pendulum* (376-77). The Magdalenic figure seems to be reincarnated in the character of Lorenza Pellegrini, who states several times, “I am the saint and the prostitute” (303, 587).

² It is also possible that the story of Mary the Egyptian, extremely popular in Spain during the Middle Ages, served as a subtext for the later repentance poems. Like Magdalen, “María la Egipcíaca” dedicated her youth to the pursuit of pleasure and her old age to penitence. See the introduction to the 1977 edition of *Vida de Santa María Egipcíaca*, by B. Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh (xiv-xv).

³ The repentant tears of Mary Magdalen in some Golden Age poems have been studied by Perry J. Powers (“*Lope de Vega and ‘Las lágrimas de la Madalena’*”). Situating Lope’s text within the context of European “tears of repentance” literature, Powers relates it to the Italian poem (Erasmus da Valvasone’s “*Lagrima di Santa Maria Maddalena*,” 1586) that is usually taken as the model for other poems on the Magdalen’s tears throughout the Continent and in England.

⁴ For a list of the Spanish poems to Peter’s tears, see Powers 274 n. 4. Francisco de Osuna discusses the superiority of tears over words in *Tercer abecedario espiritual*, Tractado 10, Chaps. 1-5 (in the 1911 edition of Miguel Mir, 430-36).

⁵ Malvern details the sixteenth-century transformation of Jean Cousin’s painting “Eva Prima Pandora” into a portrait of Mary Magdalen (8). For the myth of Pandora and her jar containing “troubles by the thousands,” see John A. Phillips, *Eve. The History of an Idea*, Chap. 2.

⁶ This and subsequent quotations from this edition are identified by line numbers.

⁷ Cristóbal de Mesa’s poem on the tears of Mary Magdalen appeared in a collection of similar texts by the same writer titled *Valle de lágrimas y diversas Rimas* published by Juan de la Cuesta in Madrid (1607). The collection also contains verses dedicated to the tears of King David, the Virgin Mary, Saint Peter, Saint Francis and Saint Augustine. All quotations refer to this edition and indicate the number of the octave cited, in this case, 4. I have modernized the usage of “u” and “v,” and have added accents.

⁸ Quotations of *La Christiada* are taken from the critical edition of Sister Mary Helen Patricia Corcoran. In my text the Book number is indicated first, followed by page number and lines, in this case, 4: 172, 25-32 and 173, 1-8. I have modernized usage of “u” and “v.”

⁹ N. pag. I have modernized usage of “u” and “v” in Sor María’s text, as well as punctuation. When Sor María speaks of “el querido del Señor,” she is quoting John 20: 2, and the “querido” is John.

■ WORKS CITED

Berlanga, Marqués de. *Dos poemas inéditos*. Ed. D.

- Manuel Pérez de Guzmán. Madrid: Fortanet, 1893.
- Cruz, Anne J. "Studying Gender in the Spanish Golden Age." *Cultural and Historical Grounding for Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Feminist Literary Criticism*. Hernán Vidal, ed. Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1989. 193-222.
- Davis, Elizabeth B. "Hagiographic Jest in Quevedo: Tradition and Departure." *Modern Language Notes* 104 (1989): 315-29.
- _____. "The Politics of Effacement: Diego de Hojeda's Humble Poetics." Forthcoming, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*.
- Eco, Umberto. *Foucault's Pendulum*. Trans. William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt, 1989.
- Fuchs, Esther. "Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Toward a Feminist Hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible." Lecture. U of Arizona. Tucson, Sept. 1986.
- Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.
- Hojeda, Diego de. *La Christiada*. Ed. Sister Mary Helen Patricia Corcoran. Washington, DC: Catholic UP, 1935.
- Hufstader, Anselm. "Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Magdalen." *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 (1969): 31-60.
- Kazantzakis, Nikos. *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Trans. P. A. Bien. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Stabat Mater." *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. 99-118.
- Malvern, Marjorie M. *Venus in Sackcloth. The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1975.
- Maria de Santo Domingo, Sor. *El libro de la oración*. Ed. José Manuel Blecuá. Madrid: Hauser y Menet, 1948.
- _____. *The Book of Prayer of Sor María of Santo Domingo*. Study and trans. Mary E. Giles. Albany: State U of New York P, 1990.
- Mesa, Cristóbal de. *Valle de lágrimas y diversas Rimas*. Madrid: Juan de la Cuesta, 1607.
- Osuna, Francisco de. *Tercer abecedario espiritual. Escritores Místicos españoles*. Ed. and intro. Miguel Mir. Vol 16, Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles. Madrid: Bailly/Bailliére, 1911. 319-587.
- Phillips, John A. *Eve. The History of an Idea*. San Francisco: Harper, 1984.
- Powers, Perry J. "Lope de Vega and 'Las lágrimas de la Madalena'." *Comparative Literature* 8 (1956): 273-90.
- Quevedo, Francisco de. *Obra poética*. Ed. José Manuel Blecuá. 4 vols. Madrid: Castalia, 1969.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978*. 33-49. New York: Norton, 1979.
- Ruiz, Juan. *El libro de buen amor*. Ed. Joan Corominas. Madrid: Gredos, 1967.
- Sandoval, Alberto. "De-centering Misogyny in Spanish Medieval Texts: The Case of Don Juan Manuel's XXXV Exemplum." *Ideologies and Literature* 4 (1989): 65-94.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her, A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1986.
- Vega Carpio, Lope Félix de. *Obras poéticas*. Ed. José Manuel Blecuá. Barcelona: Planeta, 1969.
- Vida de Santa María Egipcíaca. A Fourteenth-Century Translation of a Work by Paul the Deacon*. Ed. B. Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh. Exeter: U of Exeter, 1977.
- Voragine, Jacobus de. *The Golden Legend*. Trans. and adapt. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger. New York: Arno, 1969.
- Wahlberg, Rachel Conrad. *Jesus According to a Woman*, rev. ed. Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 1986.