Mary Magdalene as Counter-Heroine: Late Middle English Hagiography and Social Order

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Summary

This thesis, which examines episodes from Middle English Magdalene hagiography, argues that Magdalene is represented there as a counter-heroine. It concentrates on the *vita* in Mirk's *Festial* (ca. 1380s); the 1438 *Gilte Legende*; and Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (completed by 1447). The study contends that Magdalene challenges a variety of hegemonic and patriarchal structures, though her unruliness is typically suppressed by the hagiographers.

Chapter one provides context and outlines key terms which run throughout the thesis: subversion, containment and consolidation. The first part foregrounds the thesis's argument and methodology; the second part introduces the Mary Magdalene cultural narrative; the third situates the thesis in terms of work in related fields.

The second chapter interrogates the earliest chronological unit in Magdalene's medieval biography: the account of her sin and repentance. It argues that Magdalene's penance represents a moment of containment in the legend. The chapter suggests that the texts, when read as a group, depict Magdalene as choosing to surrender her social, sexual and economic freedoms. At a moment marked by anxieties about changing social roles, the hagiographies endorse a conservative model of social order.

Chapter three examines the episodes depicting the Resurrection and Magdalene's preaching activities in Marseilles. This chapter argues that although Peter's spiritual authority is emphasized in the post-Resurrection narrative, the subversive potential found in earlier representations of Magdalene's first witness is never fully erased. It argues, further, that representations of Magdalene preaching allow for readings which align the texts with more heterodox discourses about, for instance, women priests.

Chapter four focuses on the scenes describing Magdalene's years in the wilderness and nightly visitations to a wealthy prince and princess. Whereas chapters two and three argue that the protagonist challenges hegemonic structures in the fields of sexual politics and theology, this chapter argues that the avaricious prince scene presents Magdalene in her little-known role as a figure of social criticism.

The conclusion reiterates the central argument: that medieval hagiography represents Magdalene as an unruly female figure, but that her counter-heroism is frequently contained by structures of her narrative.

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List of Abbreviations

EETS: Early English Text Society

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

TEAMS: The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages

Unless otherwise stated, biblical quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals*.

Chapter Headings

The quotation in the title to chapter one is taken from: Leonora Speyer, 'One Version', in Jane Lahr, *Searching for Mary Magdalene: a journey through art and literature* (New York: Welcome Books, 2006), p. 146, ll. 19-20.

The title to chapter two cites Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene: A Morality Play*, ed. Frederic Ives Carpenter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904 [repr. Kessinger Legacy Reprint]), ll. 369-70.

The quotation in chapter three is taken from Marianne Fredrikkson, *According to Mary Magdalene*, trans. Joan Tate (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1999), p. 167.

The title to chapter four cites Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Lak of Stedfastnesse', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 654, ll. 22-23.

Chapter One: 'This is the story of Magdalene – / It isn't the tale the Apostles tell': The Thesis in Context

Mary Magdalen is, once more, very popular in our time. It is not difficult to see why. She captures the imagination. She offers women a model of feminine discipleship and ministry.
[…I]n the context of our reflection on the ordination of women, we will focus especially on Mary's function *as a heroic counter figure*, as someone who in popular Catholic imagination showed what a woman's role could be like, if it were not for prevailing masculine domination.
Sr. Theresia Saers, 'Saint Mary Magdalen', www.womenpriests.org

Mary Magdalene: sinner, bold woman, rebel, unruly female protagonist. Middle English hagiography presents Magdalene as a figure in conflict with masculine authority. She deviates from the restrictions often placed on her sex and confronts social conventions relating to appropriate female behaviour. Though structures of containment are employed throughout the texts discussed here, this thesis argues that Magdalene exists in opposition to a variety of hegemonic fields: patriarchal, theological, and socio-economic. Although the texts offset the more troubling elements of her conceptualization with images of her (at least partial) subordination to established hierarchical institutions and figures, the repetitions of these challenges present Magdalene as a threat to top-down social order.

Womenpriests.org, an organization advocating women's ordination in the Catholic Church, argues that the Magdalene of the Middle Ages can be read as a 'counter-heroine'. This figure is described as 'the first witness of the resurrection'; someone 'who had taught the apostles the truth when they went astray'; a 'woman who preached – when women were forbidden to preach'; and a female authority 'who defied male opposition'. Making reference to a twelfth-century English Psalter depicting Mary Magdalene 'addressing the assembled apostles, who respectfully listen to her, their heads bowed', the webpage states that she 'functioned as an expression of people's deep conviction that a woman *could* share the full priestly ministry'.[1] The hagiographical texts examined in this thesis also represent Magdalene

[1] 'Saint Mary Magdalen' > http.www.womenpriests.org/magdala/index.asp [accessed 7 August 2013].

as preaching to men and women, as well as being the first person to witness the Resurrection. She is also presented there as a 'counter-heroine'.

The brief comments on womenpriests.org about Magdalene's identity as 'a counter-heroine' or, to use the term employed in the epigraph to this chapter, '*heroic counter figure*' are elaborated in the thesis. It examines the hagiographers' representations of Magdalene as challenging definitions of respectable female behaviour; confronting the misrule of an avaricious prince and his wife; and implicitly raising questions about the basis for patriarchal Christianity.

Part One: The Research Project

1. The Statement of Argument

This study, which argues for Magdalene's medieval representation as counter-heroine, concentrates on some narrative episodes found in Middle English hagiography. Though the thesis refers to other versions of the legend, the main focus is on the account of her life in three vernacular collections: John Mirk's *Festial* (ca. late 1380s), the anonymous *Gilte Legende* (1438), and Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (completed by 1447). These texts have as their (direct or indirect) source the *Legenda aurea* (ca. 1260s), a Latin collection of saints' lives and an important repository for knowledge of the saints in medieval Europe.

Running throughout the thesis is the argument that Magdalene is, in a variety of ways, employed as a figure who counters dominant hegemonic structures. While Womenpriests.org lists very briefly some ways that the medieval Magdalene functions as a counter-heroine in the field of theology, this thesis uncovers a Magdalene who counters social norms and hierarchies in the fields of sexual and socio-economic politics as well. Like a number of other

(especially, though not exclusively, female) saints, Magdalene is presented as behaving in ways that are both unusual for her sex and potentially disruptive to social order.

Chapters two, three and four have different foci: the disciplining of gender, debates over spiritual authority, and attitudes towards wealth. Nevertheless, each chapter contributes to the thesis's broader overarching argument: that Magdalene is represented in opposition to figures and institutions of authority in the different fields of sexual politics, theology, and socio-economic politics. As the study develops, it becomes possible to trace a number of repeated patterns and motifs in the accounts of Mary Magdalene's life. In different narrative episodes and in different contexts, we see Magdalene's association with unruly behaviour, transgression of gender boundaries, problematic relationship with wealth, and implied threat to figures of (patriarchal, clerical and royal) authority.

Along the way, it will also become increasingly apparent that the texts treat Magdalene's counter-heroism with some anxiety. While the hagiographers (two of whom we know to be male) open up the possibility for reading Magdalene as a counter-heroic figure, they also seem keen to close down these potentially threatening representations. Although Magdalene is repeatedly represented as challenging hegemonic figures and systems, the challenges which she poses are *countered* by structures in the texts. And yet chapter three, which applies analogous approaches to those found in 'against the grain' criticism, locates the ways in which present-day, but also medieval, readers might find gaps for resistant readings.

This first chapter, after describing the thesis's methodology, establishes some important contexts of the thesis. It discusses the women of the canonical and non-canonical gospels understood in terms of 'Mary Magdalene' (both in and out of medieval Christendom). It also provides brief history of the emergence of a medieval Magdalene biography and provides further information about the three core texts examined in this thesis. The third part situates the thesis in relation to recent research in saint studies. This includes

work on hagiography, as well as scholarship specifically on Magdalene, including but not limited to the Magdalene of medieval literature. Brief consideration is given to some modern fiction on this figure, which contributes to a Mary Magdalene cultural narrative.

Chapter two examines cumulative textual representations of the episode describing Mary Magdalene's life in sin and repentance. This episode, which borrows from the tradition of interpreting Magdalene as the sinful woman from Luke 7, produces the clearest articulation of Mary Magdalene as an unruly figure and a woman who counters definitions of appropriate female behaviour. The chapter argues that representations of her repentance can be read in terms of the disciplining or correction of ambition (in women). The sinful Magdalene can be read as ambitious in the sense that she implicitly rises above the social, sexual and economic restrictions typically placed on medieval women. The chapter draws certain contrasts with the legend of Cecilia to argue that the Magdalene legends depict, and are also implicated in, processes of self-discipline. Whereas the female martyr narratives can be read in terms of the *punishment* of female unruliness, Magdalene, who turns away from certain freedoms unusual for her sex, can be understood as *disciplining* herself. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a period which some social historians have seen as an age of increasing social mobility, I argue that Mary Magdalene presents a model for 'voluntary' conformity to an (in this instance sexual) identity ascribed at birth. Though the episode can be found in earlier versions of her legend, it takes on these more nuanced meanings at the moment of the texts' cultural production.

Chapter three argues for Magdalene's potential as a counter- figure in the field of theology. This chapter, which engages with debates about spiritual primacy or leadership, points out the subversive potential of hagiographical conceptualizations of Mary Magdalene as First Witness. According to some modern scholars, Peter's position of authority in the early Church can be understood in terms of his first sighting of the resurrected Christ. As a

result, the hagiographers' descriptions of Magdalene as recipient of the protophany, or first sighting, might suggest her special status among Christ's followers. The chapter moves on to argue that Magdalene's implied pre-eminent spiritual authority (which is especially manifest in Bokenham's version of the *vita*) is later retracted in the account of her apostolic career in Marseilles. The protagonist places herself under the authority of Peter and he is depicted as a figure of spiritual leadership. Nevertheless, I argue that the subversive traces left by representations of Magdalene as First Witness are never fully wiped out. The legends, while ultimately emphasizing Peter's authority, construct a space for counter-hegemonic readings. Magdalene is described as engaging in preaching activities, roles which were prohibited to medieval women, and the hagiographers never explain the reasons for Magdalene's apparent reduction in status. The chapter reads the texts 'against the grain' to take from the episodes some of their more subversive implications. It argues that conceptializations of Magdalene as First Witness, spiritual guide and preacher have dissident potential at a moment when figures like Walter Brut were arguing for women's ability to become priests.

Whereas chapters two and three are largely focussed on 'gendering' Magdalene's identity as counter-heroine (whether in the fields of sexual politics or theology), chapter four adds a new dimension: socio-economic politics. This chapter examines the narrative episode of Mary Magdalene's life in the wilderness, before moving on to interrogate the accounts of Magdalene's terrifying nightly visitations to an avaricious prince and his wife as they lie sleeping in bed. The avaricious prince episode (which Mirk, significantly, I argue, omits in his Magdalene sermon from the late 1380s) provides the most complex and overdetermined conceptualization of Magdalene's counter-heroism. Although Magdalene is represented as an impassioned figure of social criticism, and a woman who is willing to confront what Bokenham's text explicitly describes as royal misrule, her angry words are somewhat diluted by the texts' eventual advocacy of charitable provision.

The conclusion draws together the different narrative threads to elaborate on Magdalene's identity as counter-heroine. It argues that the texts present this figure as countering various (patriarchal, theological, socio-economical) forms of authority, though the threats which she poses are repeatedly suppressed. The conclusion ends by arguing that present-day readers might seek to reanimate these late-medieval images of Magdalene as counter-heroine.

2. Methodology and Key Terms

This thesis, which examines some narrative episodes from medieval Magdalene hagiography, applies a multiple-focus methodology. It employs textual analysis, critical theory, and consideration of historical contexts, though chapters two, three and four privilege these methods to differing extents. The discussion in chapter two is informed by representations of Magdalene's sin and repentance in later texts including Lewis Wager's sixteenth-century Magdalene play, but these texts are less relevant to chapters three and four because they omits several episodes which are discussed there. The thesis provides feminist and socialist readings of the texts, and is especially concerned with the implications of its readings for medieval women and other marginal groups (including non-clerics and the non-propertied poor). Questions that arise from my readings of the texts about spiritual authority, normative gender roles, and socio-economic disparities have a political basis and continue to hold significance in present-day culture.

The study is informed by debates in feminist criticism and it provides feminist interpretations of the medieval Magdalene legends. While not only concerned with gender politics or issues relating to women (especially in chapter four), the thesis has an obvious feminist bent. Mary Magdalene, in both medieval and modern culture, is a figure who lends herself to feminist readings. Chapter two, which considers the hagiographies in view of some

later Magdalene texts, is most clearly informed by discussions in gender and feminist studies. The feminist principles which strongly inform chapters two and three are still present in chapter four.

The central terms of the thesis are similar to those underpinning some cultural materialist work in the 1980s and 1990s. Jonathon Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, in the foreword to their edited volume *Political Shakespeare*, define cultural materialism as 'a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political [which for them includes feminist and socialist] commitment and textual analysis'.[2] Like this thesis, Dollimore's and Sinfield's study is informed by a body of post-1970s criticism which is interested in the 'status of literary texts' as 'linguistic entities' and also 'ideological forces in our society'.[3] Dollimore's introduction to the collection provides a repository for certain key terms of my study.

The treatment of historical contexts is both similar and different to the approaches applied by cultural materialist critics. In his 1977 study *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams defines cultural materialism as 'a theory of the specifities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism'.[4] Further, Dollimore, in his introduction to *Political Shakespeare*, has argued that materialist criticism 'necessitates a radical contextualising of literature which eliminates the old divisions between literature and its "background", text and context'.[5] This thesis, and particularly the later chapters, does relate the texts to their late-medieval moment of cultural production. It is concerned with the implications of its readings for medieval readers and audiences; informed by knowledge of temporally-specific people, groups and events; and considers how some contemporaneous

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[2] Jonathon Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Foreword [:] Cultural Materialism', in *Political Shakespeare: New essays in cultural materialism*, ed. Dollimore and Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. vii-viii, p. vii.
[3] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'Foreword [:] Cultural Materialism', p. vii.
[4] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 5.
[5] Jonathon Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, cultural materialism and the new historicism', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Dollimore and Sinfield, pp. 2-17, p. 4.

figures (including Margery Kempe and Walter Brut) employed the figure of Mary Magdalene in actuality. Nevertheless, the central focus, unlike in much materialist criticism, is neither on the 'contexts of [the texts'] production' nor on the 'particular institutions of cultural production': historical context, while important, is not focalized as much as in some cultural materialist work.[6]

In his introduction to *Political Shakespeare*, Dollimore sets out the '[t]hree aspects of historical and cultural process [that] figure prominently in materialist criticism: consolidation, subversion and containment', writing that:

> The first [consolidation] refers, typically, to the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself; the second to the subversion of that order; the third to the containment of ostensibly subversive pressures.[7]

These ideas of consolidation, subversion and containment underpin my readings of the texts and, indeed, of Mary Magdalene as counter-heroine. Though I do not always use the terms in the same way as Dollimore, these terms are helpful in elucidating a defining pattern of the Middle English Magdalene *vitae*. It is my contention that the texts repeatedly contain images of Mary Magdalene's threatening counter-heroism (whether in the field of sexual politics, theology, or socio-economic politics), thereby consolidating traditional, top-down structures inside and outside the texts. By representing Magdalene as submitting to figures and institutions of authority, the texts provide medieval readers and audiences with a model of surrender to hierarchical order. Nonetheless, there is subversive potential in the different representations of her as sinful heiress, First Witness, preacher and spiritual guide, and angry dream visitant. In chapter three especially, I argue that the hagiographies create spaces for transgressive readings (readings that might have been mobilized by counter-hegemonic factions of late-medieval society), even if the texts are ultimately, or at least ostensibly, invested in preserving hierarchical structures.

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[6] Dollimore and Sinfield, 'Foreword [:] Cultural Materialism', p. viii.
[7] Dollimore, 'Introduction', p. 10.

The thesis shares certain parallels with Alan Sinfield's work in *Faultlines*, particularly where it provides oppositional, or 'dissident', readings of the late-medieval texts. One main premise of Sinfield's explicitly 'cultural materialist' study is that texts and institutions are invested in the production of ideology.[8] In a chapter co-written with Dollimore, the pair defines ideology as being 'composed of those beliefs, practices, and institutions that work to legitimate the social order' and argue that its:

> principal strategy […] is to legitimate inequality and exploitation by representing the social order that perpetuates these things as immutable and unalterable – as decreed by God or simply natural.[9]

During the course of the study, Sinfield examines the 'modes by which [texts and institutions] produce plausible stories and construct subjectivities', but also 'the faultlines and breaking points through which they enable dissident readings'.[10] This thesis also considers how the texts are implicated in processes of interpellation and the ways that resistant readings might be fashioned by medieval and / or present-day readers. One of the threads of Sinfield's study involves identification of conflicts, contradictions, disturbances, ruptures and inconsistencies (a model of reading associated with Pierre Macherey).

In the vein of much deconstructive analysis (including some recent queer work in medieval saint studies), Sinfield's exegesis of the text involves the location of dissident pressures. One of his arguments, for example, hinges on the fact that:

> Even if we believe that Shakespeare was trying to smooth over difficulties in absolutist ideology, to do this significantly, he must deal with the issues that resist convenient inclusion. These issues must be brought into visibility in order to be

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[8] Sinfield has drawn on Dollimore's work to argue that 'formal analysis cannot determine whether a text is subversive or contained. The historical conditions in which it is being deployed are decisive. […] This scandalizes literary criticism, because it means that meaning is not adequately deducible from the text-on-the-page. The text is a site of cultural context, but it is never a self-sufficient site'. While my thesis is not as contextualized as Sinfield's study, the arguments in the chapters which follow are informed by awareness of historical contexts (for example, social mobility in chapter two; heresy and dissent in chapter three; and the medieval poverty debates in chapter four). Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 49.

[9] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 113 and p. 114.

[10] Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 9.

> handled, and once exposed, they are available for the reader or audience to seize upon, as an alternative to the more complacent reading.[11]

Similarly, chapter three argues that although the representations of Magdalene as First Witness are 'smooth[ed] over', this potential can be reanimated by dissident readers of the late-medieval period and twenty-first century. Kiernan Ryan, providing an introduction to cultural materialism and new historicism, has written that 'cultural materialism seeks actively and explicitly to use the literature of yesterday to change the world today'. [12] And although this thesis is specifically focussed on spiritual authority in late-medieval England, related questions, for instance, about women priests do, of course, find a modern counterpoint in contemporary culture. By resurrecting Walter Brut's arguments about women's capacity for the priesthood, the thesis contributes to present-day arguments like those being expounded by womenpriests.org. [13]

A final context needs foregrounding from the outset. It has been noted above that the approaches in this thesis shares some similarities with certain approaches found in some cultural materialist studies. Cultural materialism, a methodology which in several ways informs the thinking in this thesis, overlaps in several important respects with new historicism (a second historicist criticism which focuses on power, ideology, containment and subversion).

In *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, John Brannigan argues that while cultural materialists 'look for ways in which defiance, subversion, dissidence, resistance, all forms of political opposition, are articulated, represented and performed', new historicists

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[11] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 104.
[12] Kiernan Ryan, 'Introduction', in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader*, ed. Ryan (New York; London: Arnold, 1996), pp. ix-xviii, p. xv.
[13] Theresa Coletti's medieval Magdalene study has also argued that 'historical critiques of gender and religion' impact on 'present social concerns and cultural representations of spiritual authority'. She acknowledges the way that 'contemporary feminist religious scholars invoke Mary Magdalene to point to early Christian traditions of feminine spiritual authority that they seek to recuperate for the contemporary world'. See Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 21.

'typically […] focus on the ways in which power contains any potential subversion'.[14] This distinction in terms of the treatment of subversion-containment is not unproblematic: Dollimore's and Sinfield's 'cultural materialist' study includes Stephen Greenblatt's 'Invisible Bullets', an essay which contends that the 'subversive voices' in Shakespeare's history plays 'are produced by the affirmations of order, and they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order'.[15] Greenblatt's model is more similar to Brannigan's conceptualization of new historicism. What is more important, though, is that this thesis is not just concerned with locating subversion (an approach associated with cultural materialist analysis). Chapter two, which argues that the account of Mary Magdalene's repentance can be read in terms of the disciplining of unruliness, finds in the narrative episode the containment of the sinful, counter-heroic Magdalene. I am not suggesting that the chapter has a new historicist methodology; rather, the point is that the narrative pattern which it finds in the episode has closer parallels with structures typically associated with new historicism.

To sum up, the thesis's methodology combines gender and socio-historical analysis. Its method is to survey some narrative episodes from Middle English Magdalene hagiography in relation to critical theory and historical contexts, as well as some contemporaneous texts (for example, vernacular devotional writing) and later literature on Magdalene. While a feminist thread runs throughout the thesis, certain parallels can also be drawn with cultural materialist work being produced in early modern studies. Though several differences exist between the approaches in this thesis and cultural materialist methods (materialist critics are more fundamentally concerned with the apparatus and institutions of cultural production), some of

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[14] John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, Transitions (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 108. He also notes a difference in the way that 'new historicists aim to describe the operations of power in the past' while cultural materialists 'set out to explore the historical *and* the contemporary possibilities for subversion' (p. 108).

[15] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible bullets: Renaissance authority and its subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*', in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Dollimore and Sinfield, pp. 18-47, p. 38. Faith Nostbakken has also discussed the slipperiness of, and overlaps between, definitions of new historicism and cultural materialism, making reference to the publication of what she calls 'New Historicist articles' in *Political Shakespeare*. See Faith Nostbakken, 'Cultural materialism', in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irena Makaryk (London; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 21-25, p. 24.

the critical interests and terminology find commonalities. The deconstructive readings applied in chapter three, readings which also intersect in some ways with some queer approaches in medieval saint studies, share parallels with Sinfield's dissident readings in *Faultlines.* These counter-readings are particularly suited to a counter-figure like Magdalene.

Part Two: The Mary Magdalene Cultural Narrative: Texts and Traditions

1. Mary / Magdalene(s) in the Bible and Non-Canonical Narratives

The biblical Mary Magdalene is represented by the different gospel writers in a variety of forms: the woman exorcized of seven demons, the first witness, the woman who ministered to Christ, and the faithful follower at the foot of the cross. In Western tradition she was also to become fused and confused with other women from the New Testament, namely Luke's repentant sinner, whose sin was typically understood in sexual terms, and Mary of Bethany. Following Pope Gregory the Great's (540-604) sermon on Luke 7. 36-50 (ca. 591), Mary Magdalene was interpreted as an amalgam of these three women.

In 1518 the French humanist and proto-Protestant Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (ca. 1455-1536) disentangled the threefold figure and argued in *De Maria Magdalena* [*On Mary Magdalene*] that the composite Magdalene had been an erroneous construction. In this treatise, a revised edition of his 1517 tract of the same title, Lefèvre employed biblical exegesis, as well as countering Gregory's authority with the rival *auctoritas* of Church Fathers including Jerome (ca. 347-420) and Ambrose (ca. 340-97), to argue for an understanding of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and Luke's penitent sinner as three

separate women.[16] The 1518 *De Maria Magdalena* was printed alongside two other tracts by Lefèvre. One argued that Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, had been married only once and had no other children except Mary; the other concerned the three days and nights in which Christ was purported to have been crucified, buried, and risen from the dead.[17] The material on Saint Anne appeared for the first time in this 1518 publication, but an earlier edition of the *triduum* was published in 1517 alongside the first edition of the *De Maria Magdalena*.[18] Together these three tracts, consisting of investigative scholarship into the Holy Family, challenged medieval beliefs with new humanist critique and scepticism.

In 1519, Lefèvre, having come under attack for his writings on Magdalene and Saint Anne, published a further treatise on Magdalene's identity: *De Tribus et Vnica Magdalena Disceptatio Secunda* [*On the Threefold and Single Magdalene: A Second Discussion*].[19] Perhaps because of the animosity sparked by *De Maria Magdalena*, this treatise began by 'grant[ing] to the older writers that there were three women'; to 'the moderns, who contend that that there was a single Magdalen, that there was a single Mary Magdalen in the Gospels'; and to 'the people' that Luke's sinner and Mary of Bethany were 'Mary Magdalen in popular

[16] For a transcription of the Latin text and facing-page translation of the 1518 pamphlet containing *De Maria Magdalena*, see Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, *De Maria Magdalena, Tridvo Christi, Et ex Tribus Vna Maria Disceptatio, ad Clarissimum virum D Franciscum Molinum Christianissimi Francorum Regis Francisci Primi Magistrum* [*A discussion about Mary Magdalen, Christ's Three Days in the Tomb, and the One Mary in Place of Three: to the most eminent Lord François du Moulin, master of the most Christian King of the French François I*], trans. Sheila M. Porrer, in *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates: On Mary Magdalen, on Christ's three days in the tomb, on the one Mary in place of three: a discussion; On the threefold and single Magdalen: a second discussion / introduction, Latin text, English translation and annotation by Sheila M. Porrer* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2009), pp. 156-393. See pp. 184-253 for the *De Maria Magdalena* material. For discussion of the relationship between the 1517 and 1518 editions of *De Maria Magdalen*a, see Sheila M. Porrer, 'Introduction', in *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples,* pp. 17-154, pp. 62-3.

[17] Porrer, 'Introduction', in *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples*, p. 18. For a transcription and translation of the material in the pamphlet pertaining to Saint Anne (*De Vna Et Tribus Maria* [*On the One Mary in Place of Three*]), see pp. 316-393 and for the material on Christ's three days and nights in the tomb (*De Tridvo Christi* [*On Christ's Three Days in the Tomb*]), see pp. 256-314.

[18] Porrer, 'Note on the Texts', p. 11.

[19] For further discussion of the content of this text, see Porrer, 'Introduction', in *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples,* pp. 96-103.

belief'.[20] The twenty-sixth proposition nevertheless reflects Lefèvre's own conviction that 'there is one true Mary Magdalen, and two in popular belief'.[21]

Added to the complications over Magdalene's composite identity, a number of recent critics working in the field of alternative Christianities have wanted to draw parallels between the biblical Magdalene(s) and some of the Marys of gnostic and apocryphal Christian traditions. The discovery in the twentieth century of a substantial body of heterodox texts (thirteen codices in total) at the city of Nag Hammadi, coupled with the earlier discovery of the *Gospel of Mary*, has been hugely important to scholars interested in early Christian origins. The teachings in these texts, which differ in many ways from the teachings of the Bible, shows how Christianity might have developed had these tracts not been suppressed.

While scholarship on Mary Magdalene has been very interested in these gnostic Marys, medieval readers and audiences, at least as far as we know, could not have been familiar with the apocryphal gospels or with the gnostic Mary(s) themselves: texts like the *Pistis Sophia* and *Gospel of Mary*, discussed later in the chapter, were unknown or virtually unknown to scholars in the West until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, and the Nag Hammadi finds in Upper Egypt did not occur until 1945.[22] Even though these texts do not have a direct textual relationship with the hagiographies discussed in this thesis, they form an important part of the Mary Magdalene cultural narrative. Magdalene is often associated in present-day culture with the Marys of the gnostic gospels

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[20] See Lefèvre, *De Tribvs Et Vnica Magdalena Disceptatio Secunda, ad Reuerendum in Christo Patrem D. Dionysivm Briconnetum Episcopum Maclouien sem apud Leonem X Pontificem Max. Christianissimi Francorum Regis Francisci I oratorem* [*A Second Discussion about the Threefold and Single Magdalen, to the Reverend Father in Christ my Lord Denys Briçonnet, Bishop of St Malo, Ambassador of the most Christian King of the French, François I, to the Supreme Pontiff Leo X',* in *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples*, pp. 396-489, p. 401.

[21] Lefèvre, *De Tribvs Et Vnica Magdalena Disceptatio*, p. 437.

[22] The *Pistis Sophia* was purchased from Dr Anthony Askew's collection in 1785 by the British Museum and a manuscript containing *The Gospel of Mary* was purchased in 1896 in Cairo. See Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 36. For discussion of the events pertaining to Muhammad 'Alī's discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, see Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 13-14.

(including the Gospel of Philip's 'Mary Magdalene'). Recent critical studies of Mary Magdalene have usually chosen to include discussion of the gnostic Marys and several recent fictional conceptualizations of Mary Magdalene draw on the gnostic material. Many of the Nag Hammadi tracts present very different teachings to the teachings found in the canonical gospels and several place significant emphasis on a female follower ('Mary' or a variant of 'Mary') who is held in special esteem by the Saviour.

'Gnostic' and 'gnosticism' are not unambiguous terms and they cover a variety of ideas which are not always identically rendered nor all discernable in particular texts, and there is clear variation among texts generally regarded as informed by gnostic beliefs and ideologies in the degree of influence from, and affinities with, a Jewish, Christian, and pagan traditions and writings.[23] But, as Elaine Pagels argues in her seminal study *The Gnostic Gospels*, there appears a recurring emphasis in the (by general agreement) largely 'gnostic' Nag Hammadi finds on the idea of spiritual enlightenment, and on the representation of a 'founder who is presented not as Lord, but as spiritual guide'.

There is also a recurrent emphasis on this world as an illusion and therefore valueless to the spirit. Such tendencies within 'gnostic' writings include also the absence of a doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ, and of Redemption, and a teaching that an individual soul may be able to ascend in mystic knowledge which transcends the normal capacities of the human soul. While many of the Nag Hammadi texts include, as Pagels puts it, 'the same *dramatis personae* as the New Testament – Jesus and his disciples' and many 'refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and others to the letters of Paul and the New Testament gospels', some of the texts include ideas completely alien to mainstream (orthodox) Christianity. These ideas include the claim that human souls can rise to attain divine knowledge: including the

[23] Likewise, there is considerable diversity among the different Nag Hammadi texts. Although many of the Nag Hammadi finds are 'distinctively Christian', Elaine Pagels says that 'some texts […] show little or no Christian influence; a few derive primarily from pagan sources (and may not be "gnostic" at all); others make extensive use of Jewish traditions'. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 29.

argument that 'self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical'; and a consequent reduction in the status of Christ for the disciple who can ascend spiritually to such knowledge (Pagels notes that 'when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: the two have become equal').[24] The doctrine of Christ's redemptive power, central to Christian interpretations of the gospels' accounts of his life and Resurrection, loses importance in gnostic spiritual teachings. That fact itself reinforces the gnostic tendency to envisage the possibility of human souls transcending their own merely human states of being and rising towards divine levels of knowledge.[25]

Given these tenets of gnostic ideology, it becomes clear why accounts of a 'Mary' to whom Christ gives special revelations, become significant for writers of gnostic texts and why such interpretations of a woman disciple's role should constitute such potentially threatening developments for orthodox exegesis of the relations between Christ and Mary Magdalene and her Resurrection sighting of Christ. It should be noted from the outset, however, that a text does not have to be a Nag Hammadi find to be considered 'gnostic': the *Gospel of Mary* is a gnostic text discovered before Nag Hammadi. The so-called 'gnostic Mary' (or Marys), variously referred to in the original texts as Mary, Mary Magdalene, Marihamme or Marihamne, is of special interest to feminist biblical scholars both because she is depicted as the recipient of singular knowledge or *gnosis* and also because she is presented in conflict with Peter.[26] Mary, like the Magdalene of medieval hagiography, has the potential to be interpreted as a counter-heroine, whose (in this instance spiritual) authority

[24] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 19.
[25] Pagels comments that some 'gnostic' texts present a position of scepticism towards the idea that Jesus is 'forever distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save'. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 19.
[26] F. Stanley Jones also notes that the gnostic Mary 'is often given special revelations and stands in conflict with known male leaders in early Christianity such as the twelve apostles. Modern feminist critique of ancient Christianity has consequently shown a particular interest in this Mary. At stake, in part, is the larger question of female leadership in Christianity, then and now. A theory has developed that this gnostic Mary, often called Mariamme, is none other than Mary Magdalene and that there was a ''liberated'' tradition under the auspices of Mary Magdalene from the earliest period onwards'. F. Stanley Jones, 'Introduction', in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. Jones, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series; 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), pp. 1-4, p. 2.

is contained by some of the men in the narrative.

While Stephen J. Shoemaker has issued caution over the trend in modern scholarship for identifying the gnostic Mary with Mary Magdalene, his argument that there might be a case for reading this figure (or these figures) in terms of Mary of Nazareth has been called into question, or at least problematized, by some other contributors to the 2002 volume *Which Mary?*[27] Antti Marjanen, focussing on the Dormition texts, concludes that 'the traditional understanding according to which Mary in these so-called gnostic writings is Magdalene is still most likely' and Ann Graham Brock argues that if:

> one takes into account not only the quality of explicit identifications of Mary Magdalene in the [*Pistis Sophia*] but also the abundant implicit descriptions and epithets, the primary status of Mary Magdalene in *Pistis Sophia* 1-3 is indeed the most persuasive and credible choice.[28]

Though medieval hagiographers could not have been familiar with the gnostic texts, there are, as some criticism has noted, certain commonalities between ideas found in the gnostic gospels and elements found in hagiographical and other medieval texts. Marjorie Malvern argues in her adventurous study that there are parallels between conceptualizations of Jacobus de Voragine's (ca. 1230-98) Magdalene as 'illuminatrix'; 'goddess of life and […] Christ's feminine counterpart'; and the one who '''enlightens'' the ''unenlightened''', and some of the Marys of early gnostic and apocryphal traditions.[29] Barbara Newman's scholarly discussion of the German "*Sister Catherine" Treatise* [*Schwester Katrei*], a text that can

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[27] Shoemaker warns against 'simply [identifying] Mary of Nazareth with the gnostic Mary, as was previously done in Magdalene's case' and describes the 'curious, apocryphal woman' as 'a composite figure, who draws both the Nazarene and the Magdalene into her identity'. See Stephen J. Shoemaker, 'A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary', in *Which Mary?*, pp. 5-30, p. 30.

[28] Antti Marjanen, 'The Mother of Jesus or Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts', in *Which Mary?*, pp. 31-41, p. 41; and Ann Graham Brock, 'Setting the Record Straight – The Politics of Identification: Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in *Pistis Sophia*', in *Which Mary*?, pp. 45-52, p. 52.

[29] Marjorie Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses* (Carbondale; Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1975), p. 90, p. 96, and p. 98. Malvern, who claims to be the first scholar to examine 'the prominent place given the fictionalized Mary Magdalene in second-century Gnostic writings' (p. xi), argues that the Magdalene 'pictured in the *Golden Legend* […] retains radically dualistic concepts placed in the figure by writers of the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Pistis Sophia*' (pp. 96-8). She points out elsewhere in her study Steven Runciman's argument that the Crusades 'carried old Eastern dualism into the West, particularly into France and Germany' and argues that 'the Magdalen was […] one of the vessels in which the old radical dualism was carried' (p. 72).

'perhaps be dated to the second quarter of the fourteenth century' and is one of the 'many dubiously orthodox texts that circulated in Meister Eckhart's name', examines both the textual representation of Mary Magdalene and the presence of apparently 'gnostic' motifs.[30] Newman, who makes brief reference to Malvern's work, acknowledges that although to 'characterize *Schwester Katrei* itself as ''gnostic'' would be going too far', the 'shadowy survival of gnostic ideas, sporadically and unpredictably encountered in medieval texts, is a real if baffling phenomenon'.[31]

While this question of whether a gnostic framework existed into the later Middle Ages does not concern this thesis (it can be assumed that the hagiographers had no knowledge of these texts), the gnostic material helps to elucidate some of the different strands of my discussion. As well as being part of the Mary Magdalene cultural narrative, gnosticism shares a number of commonalities with medieval mysticism, and certain ideas found in medieval mystical texts find similarities with the ideas associated with gnosticism. Indeed, there is an emphasis in (at least some versions of) both religious cultures on spiritual love, wisdom through contemplation, and the ability to move beyond knowledge taught by clerics. In texts from both cultures too, 'Mary' or Magdalene is highly valued for her special insights and relationship with the Divine. She has the potential to provide gnostics and medieval mystics (most notably women mystics) with a counter-model of spirituality.

2. 'Mary Magdalene' in the New Testament

Differences between the four gospel accounts of Mary Magdalene have implications for the discussion of Magdalene narratives in relation to historical disputes about religious authority in chapter three. The earliest representation of the New Testament figure explicitly named as 'Mary Magdalene' is found in the Gospel of Mark (ca. 70).

[30]Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 172.
[31] Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 180 and p. 181.

As well as commenting that this woman was part of a female circle who 'used to follow him [Christ] and minister to him when he was in Galilee' (15. 41), Mark also specifically names Magdalene as witness to the Crucifixion and one of the women 'who stood watching from far off' (15. 40).[32] Magdalene later attends the sepulchre with Salome and Mary the mother of James, but they are unable to anoint the body since they learn from a young man in white robes that Christ has risen from the dead (16. 5-6). This man commissions the women to: 'Go and tell Peter and the rest of his disciples that he is going before you into Galilee' (16. 7). Though the earliest manuscripts conclude with the statement that the women 'said nothing to anyone, out of fear' (16. 8), an interpolation from the first half of the second century goes on to say that Christ had 'risen again […] and shewed himself first of all to Mary Magdalen, the woman out of whom he had cast seven devils' (16. 9).[33] This longer ending of Mark (16. 9-20), containing the traditions of the exorcism of demons and the first sighting, represents the disciples' disbelief at Magdalene's sighting (16. 11).

Though the gospel of *Matthew* (ca. 80) corresponds in describing Magdalene as one of the women from Galilee who 'stood watching [the Crucifixion] from far off' (27. 55), there are differences in the post-Crucifixion account. On attending the sepulchre with the other Mary, an angel appears to the women and tells them that they should 'tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead; and now he is going on before you into Galilee, where you shall have sight of him' (28. 7). On their way to tell the disciples, Jesus meets the women (28. 9) and commissions them to 'give word to [his] brethren' that they will see him in Galilee (28. 10). Although the women are not represented as carrying out this task, the eleven

[32] Mark 15. 41, in *The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis. Unless stated otherwise, the dates given for the canonical and non-canonical gospels discussed are those used in Esther de Boer's 'Translated Texts in Chronological Order': Esther de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up: The Sources Behind the Myth*, trans. John Bowden (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 205-6.

[33] See Ann Graham Brock on the uncertainty over the ending of Mark. Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*, Harvard Theological Studies 51 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 62-3. The suggested dating of the so-called Markan appendix is taken from de Boer and not Brock.

disciples go into Galilee 'where Jesus had bidden them meet him' (28. 16). Unlike in the Markan interpolation, there is neither reference to Magdalene being exorcised by demons nor being doubted by the male disciples, and it is also clear that she does not receive the protophany (first sighting) alone.

Luke (ca. 80-90) plays down Magdalene's significance and provides the earliest extant version of the exorcism of demons narrative.[34] Mary Magdalene, who is identified immediately as having had 'seven devils cast out of her' (8. 2), is described as a woman who followed Christ when he was 'preaching and spreading the good news of God's kingdom' (8. 1). The Crucifixion narrative relates that the women from Galilee 'watched […], standing at a distance' (23. 49), without specifically naming Magdalene. On attending the sepulchre with spices, the Galilee women encounter two men in shining clothes who ask them why they seek the living among the dead (24. 5). Although not specifically commissioned to do so, the women (said to include Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, 24. 10) tell the eleven and others of their encounter: 'but to their [the male followers'] minds the story seemed madness, and they could not believe it' (24. 11). Although Peter rushes to the tomb after hearing these words, he finds it empty (24. 12), and it is only later reported by some of the disciples that: 'The Lord has indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon [Peter]' (24. 34). As in the writings of Paul (dated to the middle of the first century), Magdalene is never described by Luke as receiving an appearance of the resurrected Christ.[35]

The Gospel of John (ca. 90), which, in contrast, emphasizes Mary Magdalene's special significance as a holy woman and close associate of Christ, makes no reference to exorcism from demons. This text states that Magdalene had 'taken [her] stand beside the cross of Jesus'

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[34] This de-emphasis in Luke appears to relate, already, to the divergence of views about leadership in the early Church, which will cast such a shadow over the handling of parts of the Magdalene tradition during two millennia. Brock explores ways in which the gospel of Luke, as the 'most pro-Petrine of the canonical gospels', lessens Mary Magdalene's role and enhances 'the status of Peter as a leader of the early church'. Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle,* pp. 19-40, p. 40 and p. 20.

[35] See 1 Corinthians 15. 5-6 on how Christ was 'seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the eleven apostles, and afterwards by more than five hundred of the brethren at once'.

– rather than observing from afar – with Mary of Nazareth, Christ's mother's sister, and Mary the wife of Cleophas (19. 25). There is in this account a reference to how 'Jesus, seeing his mother there, and the disciple, too, whom he loved, standing by, said to his mother, Woman, this is thy son' (19. 26). While a number of recent writers, especially those writing for a popular readership, have wanted to read Magdalene as the beloved disciple, such a reading is problematized and may be completely ruled out by the subsequent sentences and the Greek grammatical forms used in them: 'Then he said to the disciple, This is thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her into *his* own keeping' (19. 27, my emphasis) and by a later reference in the gospel, quite clearly not to Mary Magdalene, to 'that other disciple, whom Jesus loved' (20. 2).[36]

The account in John not only places greater emphasis on Magdalene's physical closeness to Christ in the Crucifixion narrative, but points to the special affinity between the pair in the account of the Resurrection. After finding the sepulchre empty, Magdalene tells Peter and the 'disciple, whom Jesus loved' (20. 2), who run to the sepulchre and discover the body missing. Since the men 'had not yet mastered what was written of him, that he was to rise from the dead' (20. 9), both go home. Remaining at the sepulchre, Magdalene, crying, has a vision of two angels, who ask her why she weeps. After responding that 'they have carried away my Lord […] and I cannot tell where they have taken him' (20. 13), a representation which justifies the typological association subsequently established between

[36] Richard J. Hooper's own popular and explicitly polemical study *The Crucifixion of Mary Magdalene: The Historical Tradition of the First Apostle and the Ancient Church's Campaign to Suppress It* (Sedona: Sanctuary Publications, 2005) acknowledges that there is not enough evidence to 'make a serious case for Mary Magdalene [as] the beloved disciple' (pp. 217-8) and that it is mainly 'theorists outside the academic community' who have developed thse kinds of readings (p. 218), but he points out some of the arguments that could be used to suggest a convergence between Mary Magdalene and the 'beloved disciple'. While, as Hooper grants, it seems 'clear enough that Jesus [is] referring to a man, not a woman, in this text, since he uses ''uios'', the Greek word for ''son'', in referring to the beloved disciple' (p. 217), the term is also employed in the New Testament to 'refer to someone who is *not* a direct offspring or descendent, but is adopted as a *spiritual* "son"' and 'could, technically, refer to either a man or a woman' (p. 217). Coupled with the point that '[i]n the first sentence, John names four people, and they are all women' (p. 217), there is a case (albeit not an especially strong one, as Hooper concedes) for understanding Magdalene as the beloved disciple, an image found in some versions of Middle English hagiography.

Mary Magdalene and the Bride from the Song of Songs, Jesus appears to her.[37] She does not immediately recognize him, but assumes that he is the gardener. When he calls to her by name, she recognizes him and addresses him as 'Rabboni (which is the Hebrew for Master)' (20. 16). After the *noli me tangere* in which Christ tells her not to touch him because he has not yet ascended, she is given a commissioning to 'Return to my brethren, and tell them this; I am going up to him who is my Father and your Father, who is my God and your God' (20. 17). When she does so, there is no reference to her tale being doubted. The emphasis in John's text seems instead to be on constructing her as a figure of religious authority.

3. New Testament Women Conflated with Mary Magdalene

While I have outlined above the New Testament representations of the figure explicitly referred to as Mary Magdalene, the Magdalene of the Middle Ages was constructed out of a number of other biblical women as well as the Mary Magdalene of the gospel accounts. In the late sixth century (ca. 591), Pope Gregory the Great gave a sermon on repentance in which he argued that:

> This woman, whom Luke calls a sinner, John names Mary. I believe that she is the same Mary of whom Mark says that seven demons had been cast out. How should we interpret the seven demons except as the totality of vices? […] But you see that because she was aware of the stains of her disgrace she ran to the fountain of mercy to be washed clean.[38]

Elaborating on her sins, he went on to describe how:

> *She brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind Jesus at his feet, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment*. It is evident, my friends, that a

[37] Compare Song of Songs 3.1-2: 'In the night watches, as I lay abed, I searched for my heart's love, and searched in vain. Now to stir abroad, and traverse the city, searching every alley-way and street for him I love so tenderly! But for all my search I could not find him […].' Haskins discusses the tradition of representing Mary Magdalene in terms of the Bride, arguing that: 'To Hippolytus, the Bride, or Shulamite, as she sought the Bridegroom, was Mary Magdalen, the myrrhophore, seeking Christ in the garden to anoint him. Hippolytus oddly names her Martha and Mary, but it is clear from context that he is referring to the figure of Mary Magdalen.' Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 63.

[38] Gregory the Great, 'Homily 33', in *Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series: One-Hundred-Twenty-Three (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1990), pp. 268-79, p. 269.

> woman who had earlier been eager for actions which are not allowed had used the ointment as a scent for her own body. What she had earlier used disgracefully for herself she now laudably offered for the Lord. Her eyes had sought earthly things; now, chastising them through repentance, she wept. She had used her hair to beautify her face; now she used it to wipe away her tears. She had spoken proudly with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet she fixed it to the footsteps of her Redeemer. She found as many things to sacrifice as she had ways of offering pleasure. She converted the number of faults into the number of virtues, so that she could serve God as completely in repentance as she had rejected him in sin (original emphasis).[39]

Gregory was not the first person to raise the question as to the relation between these different women; in the fourth century, for example, Ambrose (ca. 340-97) had asked: 'Were there Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary Magdalen, or more people?' [40] Gregory's sermon, however, authorized the conflation of the figures of Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, the woman who anointed Jesus, Luke's sinner in the city, and, implicitly, the woman taken in adultery. This understanding was to hold dominance throughout the Middle Ages and it was not until the reform of the Roman calendar in 1969 that the Catholic Church declared that the Magdalene of the New Testament was not the penitent sinner of Luke's gospel.[41]

Presumably owing to her representation as the woman exorcized of seven demons, Magdalene was understood by Gregory as Luke's 'sinner in the city'. Luke 7 describes how Jesus was in the house of Simon the Pharisee when:

> a sinful woman in the city, who, hearing that he was at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought a pot of ointment with her, and took her place behind him at his feet, weeping; then she began washing his feet with her tears, and drying them with her hair, kissing his feet, and anointing them with the ointment (7. 37-8).

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[39] Gregory the Great, 'Homily 33', pp. 269-70.

[40] Ambrose, cited in Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 93. For further discussion of the treatment of this question by Church Fathers including Ambrose, Augustine (354-430) and Jerome (ca. 347-420), see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, pp. 93-5.

[41]Katherine Ludwig Jansen writes that '[f]our hundred and fifty-two years after Lefèvre attacked the Gregorian saint the Roman Catholic church decided to dismantle the composite Magdalen. As of 1969 it was decreed that she was to be venerated only as a disciple, the revised title inscribed after her name in the new calendar'. Jansen, however, does not focus on her disentanglement from Luke's sinner, but on the fact that '[n]ow Mary Magdalen was to be remembered merely as one of many of Christ's disciples, a pale shadow of the complexity of her symbolic significance in the Middle Ages'. Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 335-6 and p. 336.

Though the Pharisee criticizes Jesus for allowing this 'kind of woman, a sinner' to have touched him (7. 39), drawing on imagery of (un)cleanness and pollution, Jesus forgives her because of her 'faith' (7. 50) and because she has 'greatly loved' (7. 47).

The account of a female sinner redeemed by Christ also appears in the story of the woman taken in adultery and explains Magdalene's association with sexual sin.[42] In the gospel of John, the Pharisees bring to Christ a woman 'caught in the act of adultery' (8. 4), asking if she should be stoned to death according to the Old Law. Just as Christ admonishes the hypocrisy of Simon the Pharisee in the 'sinner in the city' account, he tells the Pharisees that whoever is without sin should 'cast the first stone at her' (8. 7). Seeing that all the men leave, Jesus tells the woman: 'I will not condemn thee either. Go, and do not sin again henceforward' (8. 11).

Relating in a different way to the 'sinner in the city' narrative, Matthew 26, Mark 14 and John 12 tell of a woman who anoints Christ's head. This figure, who is explicitly identified in John 12 as Mary, Sister of Lazarus, is described as anointing Christ with precious ointment. Unlike in the 'sinner in the city' narrative, the woman is described neither as performing an act of penance nor as anointing Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee, but is similarly criticized by some men in Jesus's circle. Mark 14 relates that while Christ was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 'a woman came in with a pot of very precious spikenard ointment, which, first breaking the pot, she poured over his head' (14. 3). Angry at her wastefulness, some complain that the ointment 'might have been sold for more than three hundred pieces of silver, and alms might have been given to the poor' (14. 5). Jesus, however, defends her actions, and says that 'she has anointed my body beforehand to prepare it for burial' (14. 8), a reference that might liken her to Mary Magdalene, who attends

[42]Jane Schaberg further relates Mary Magdalene's association with sexual sin to legends associated with Magdala, a town 'generally identified with the site of Migdal on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee'. The town, Schaberg argues, 'had a reputation for opulence and immorality. According to *y. Ta'anit* 4, 69c, ''Magdala was destroyed because of prostitution (*znut*)''; according to *Midrash Ekha* 2, 2,4, because of the profound corruption of its inhabitants'. Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004), p. 47 and p. 55.

the sepulchre with other women to anoint the body. Matthew 26. 6-13 presents a version of events almost exactly the same as those outlined in Mark.

John 12 explicitly names the anointing woman as Mary of Bethany (or Mary, Sister of Lazarus), explaining how Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany could be understood as the same Mary. John's account relates that after Martha had served Jesus in a supper six days before Passover, 'Mary brought in a pound of pure spikenard ointment, which was very precious, and poured it over Jesus' feet, wiping his feet with her hair' (12. 3), the reference to her hair drawing links to Luke's 'sinner in the city'. Judas Iscariot is described as criticizing her for wasting money that could have been given to the poor, but the evangelist comments that '[h]e said this, not from any concern for the poor, but because he was a thief' (12. 6). Jesus defends Mary, as he defended the 'sinner in the city' and the 'woman taken in adultery' (12. 7-8).

Earlier in John's gospel it is said that 'this Mary, whose brother Lazarus had now fallen sick, was the woman who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair' (11. 2). The account focuses on how 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus' (11.5), which provides a possible link to the 'beloved disciple' depicted in the Crucifixion and Resurrection scenes, and it also tells of how Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. When Martha rushes to tell Christ that Lazarus has died, Mary is described as having 'sat on in the house' (11. 20), a representation which has parallels with the depiction of Luke's Mary of Bethany, and fits with a contrast which was to have a long history, of Mary as a follower of Jesus through experience and Martha as one who follows him through active virtues. It is later said that Mary, accompanied by other tearful Jews, cried at Christ's feet that Lazarus would not have died had he been present, resulting in Christ 'sigh[ing] deeply, and distress[ing] himself' over their tears (11. 33). As well as corresponding with the iconography

associated with the 'sinner in the city' (the tears; the woman at Christ's feet), this passage emphasizes the special love that Christ has for Mary and her siblings.

The seeds of the tradition linking Mary and Martha to the contemplative and the active lives respectively, which was to flower particularly in conceptualizations of mystical devotion in the later Middle Ages, are also present in Luke's gospel. Mary, sister of Martha, is named in Luke 10, where Christ is described as having been entertained on one of his journeys in the house of 'a woman called Martha' (10. 38). While Martha serves Christ, her sister Mary 'took her place at the Lord's feet, and listened to his words' (10. 39). Though Martha admonishes her sister and asks Christ to join her in reprimanding Mary, he turns to her and says:

> Martha, Martha, how many cares and troubles thou hast! But only one thing is necessary; and Mary has chosen for herself the best part of all, that which shall never be taken away from her (10. 41-2).

While in Eastern Orthodox tradition, Mary Magdalene was never understood as a composite saint, this composite model was to hold pre-eminence in the medieval West.[43] Mary Magdalene, a figure whom the gospel writers only agree was present at the Crucifixion and attended the sepulchre, was to be interpreted in terms of the woman who sat at Christ's feet and heard his words, the 'sinner in the city', the woman taken in adultery, and other women of the New Testament. Susan Haskins, discussing Gregory's foundational biography, writes:

> And so the transformation of Mary Magdalen was complete. From the gospel figure, with her active role as herald of the New Life – the Apostle to the Apostles – she became the redeemed whore and Christianity's model of repentance, a manageable, controllable figure, and effective weapon and instrument of propaganda against her own sex.[44]

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[43] Surveying the differences between the conceptualizations of Mary Magdalene found in the Easter sermon of Gregory the Great and an Easter sermon from the same century by Gregory, Bishop of Antioch, Esther de Boer writes: 'In the sermon from Rome Mary Magdalene bewails her sins. In the sermon from Antioch she is ''ordained apostle'' by Christ. In Rome Mary Magdalene is the model for people who have ''lost the purity of the flesh'' through sensual desire. In Antioch she is witness to the resurrection and the ''first teacher of the teachers'' for people who long to know more about the mystery of death and life'. de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, p. 156.

[44] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, pp. 96-7.

These words of Hawkins articulate succinctly a crucial shift in the received image of Mary Magdalene, one with major political significance in relation to power within the Church. Her composite story places this potentially powerful female follower of Jesus firmly within the constraints of the long-established associations between both femaleness and sex with sin, as well as the authority vested in a male and clerical establishment. Magdalene becomes a symbol of penance, a sacrament granted to medieval sinners by male clerics, deriving their authority from succession to Peter, rather than a female disciple who has her own specially-granted power to reveal divine truth and proclaim the Resurrection. In Haskins' view, the composite Magdalene functions at the service of patriarchal power. She furthers male, clerical interests.

4. The Marys of Gnostic and Apocryphal Tradition

The Mary Magdalene, or Mary Magdalenes, of the New Testament has also been interpreted by some recent scholars in terms of the Marys of gnostic and apocryphal tradition.[45] Owing to the popular success of Dan Brown's bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), source material pertaining to Mary Magdalene and gnosticism has become more easily accessible with Marvin Meyer providing literary selections, Jane Lahr excerpts and visual representations, and the continually updated Magdalene.org a wealth of contextual material.[46] Three of the most prolific conceptualizations of a gnostic Mary Magdalene are as beloved follower, enlightened female figure, and the woman persecuted on the grounds of her sex, and these representations link up to some depictions of Mary Magdalene in the canonical

[45] While it is more common to see these figures and the texts in which they appear referred to as 'gnostic', de Boer, perhaps attempting to circumvent difficulties of nomenclature, classifies the *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of Philip* and other non-orthodox, non-canonical Christian ('gnostic'?) literature as 'New Testament Apocrypha'. This term, however, says nothing about the emphasis on wisdom and enlightenment (*gnosis*) and might be considered too broad. de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, pp. 212-13.

[46] See Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004); Marvin Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene, the Companion of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Jane Lahr, *Searching For Mary Magdalene: a journey through art and literature* (New York: Welcome Books, 2006); http://www.magdalene.org [accessed 7 August 2013].

gospels. As a result of their unorthodox teachings, however, about individual spiritual enlightenment and their sometimes overt anti-authoritarianism, playing down the importance of religious authority in contrast to individual revelations, and reducing even the unique power and nature of Jesus himself, the texts discussed below were suppressed and deemed heretical by the early Church.[47] As Pagels has noted, around 150 C.E texts like the Nag Hammadi finds were condemned as heretical and by the fourth century, when Constantine the Great converted to Christianity, many of the texts were burnt and people found in possession of them considered heretics.[48]

Though the gospel of John suggested a special affinity between Mary Magdalene and the resurrected Christ, a number of the non-canonical gospels present more strongly-worded description of the relationship between Mary / Magdalene and the Saviour. In the third-century *Gospel of Philip*, the narrator relates that there:

> were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion.[49]

While Magdalene is represented as a close associate, Haskins, citing R. McL. Wilson's argument, observes that 'companion' is in fact a weak translation and that the 'Greek word *koinonōs* used to describe Mary Magdalen […] is more correctly translated as ''partner'' or ''consort'', a woman with whom a man has had sexual intercourse'.[50] These representations of a close, and implicitly sensual, relationship between the pair are developed in the

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[47] See Pagels' discussion of the potentially anti-clerical elements associated with gnosticism and her argument that, for orthodox Christians like Irenaeus, '*Gnosis* offers nothing less than a theological justification for refusing to obey the bishops and priests!' Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pp. 63-7, p. 63. See also the speech of Eleleth, the Great Angel in *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (tentatively dated by Roger A. Bullard to the third century), for an example of anti-authoritarianism: 'Do you think these Rulers have any power over you (sing)? None of them can prevail against the Root of Truth; for on its account he appeared in the final ages (text corrupt) and these Authorities will be restrained. And these Authorities cannot defile you and that generation; for your (pl.) abode is in Incorruptibility, where the Virgin Spirit dwells, who is superior to the Authorities of chaos and to their universe'. Bentley Layton (trans.), *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, introduced by Roger A. Bullard, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, trans. by members of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity; James M. Robinson, director (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 152-61, p. 157.
[48] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, pp. 17-18.
[49] Wesley W. Isenberg (trans.), *The Gospel of Philip*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library,* pp. 131-51, pp. 135-6.
[50] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 40.

descriptions of how Christ used to 'kiss' Magdalene '[often] on her [mouth]'; the extant manuscript has, however, been damaged and 'mouth' is only the outcome of conjectural scholarly reconstruction.[51] While it is possible to read the gospel as implying a physical relationship between Jesus and the gnostic Mary Magdalene, the kiss could instead be interpreted in sacred terms. Discussing the broader concept of the *Osculum Pacis* in relation to what he calls the "Holy Kiss" described in *The Gospel of Philip*, Arthur Frederick Ide argues that:

> Not only was the kiss considered a greeting of peace between two people – as was to have been exchanged between Jesus and Judas Iscariot on the night the Galilean was betrayed – but it was symbolic of pure thought and deed: 'For the perfect conceive through a kiss and give birth. Because of this we also kiss each other. We receive [spiritual] conception from the Grace [of God] (charis) which is among us.' [52]

The Gospel of Philip is not unique in suggesting a singular bond between Jesus and a Mary figure: the *Gospel of Mary*, while not as sensationally or ambiguously phrased and referring more obliquely to 'Mary', presents the special relationship between Christ and a figure interpreted by critics including Karen King as Mary Magdalene.[53] In this text, dating to the first half of the second century, Peter acknowledges that 'the Savior loved [Mary (Magdalene?)] more than the rest of women', and Levi [Matthew] develops this idea further, arguing that 'the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us'.[54]

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[51] *The Gospel of Philip*, p. 138.
[52] Arthur Frederick Ide, *God's Girls: Ordination of Women in the Early Christian & Gnostic Churches* (Garland, Texas: Tangelwüld Press, 1986), p. 118. Ide is here quoting from the *Gospel of Philip*.
[53] See Karen L. King, 'The Gospel of Mary Magdalene', in *Searching the Scriptures: Volume Two. A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, with the assistance of Ann Brock and Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 601-34.
[54] George W. MacRae and R. McL. Wilson (trans.), *The Gospel of Mary*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 471-4, p. 472 and p. 473.

As chapter three will discuss, some versions of the medieval Mary Magdalene legends also place great emphasis on a singular love shared between Christ and Magdalene, a representation which is also developed in the pseudo-Chaucerian 'Lamentation of Saint Mary Magdalene' (ca. 1460-80).[55]

Related to the representation of the non-canonical Mary(s) as a beloved disciple, this figure is also presented as recipient of special knowledge or *gnosis.* The *Gospel of Mary* describes Mary as having received secret wisdom from Jesus. In this account, focussing on a vision received by Mary, Peter asks her to tell 'us the words of the Savior which you remember – which you know (but) we do not nor have we heard them' and Mary promises to 'proclaim' to the male disciples what has been 'hidden from [them]'.[56] The conceptualizations in the *Gospel of Mary* of the protagonist as 'knowing' woman correspond with understandings of the Lukan Mary of Bethany, typically interpreted after 591 in terms of Mary Magdalene, as a female figure of contemplation.

The third-century *Pistis Sophia*, which presents a particularly elaborate exposition of gnostic concepts of both a feminine aspect of divine wisdom and salvation, and of the glory of ascent in spiritual contemplation, also presents a Mary (or Marys) who shares parallels with the woman from Luke 'who chose the best part' and the traditions of contemplation associated with her. In the first book of this text, Mary, referred to in the margin summary as Mary Magdalene, is described as having 'gazed fixedly into the air for the space of an hour'

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[55] In this text, once associated with Chaucer, Magdalene, finding the empty tomb, meditates on Christ's sufferings on the cross and promises to search high and low for her lost paramour: 'His blessed face if I might se and finde / Serche I wolde every coste and country / The gardist part of Egypt, or hote Inde / Shulde be to me but a litil journey'. The representations of Magdalene share parallels with the figure of the Bride from the Song of Songs, itself interpreted from the twelfth century as an allegory of the soul's search for divine truth and union through contemplation, and, for a reader familiar with pagan traditions, also has affinities with the narrative account of Isis searching for her slain consort Osiris (another of the dying-and-rising gods). See Anon, 'The Lamentation of Saint Mary Magdalene', [From 'The Lamentation of Saint Mary Magdalene', 1871], ll. 323-6. Available at: Literature Online > http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk [Accessed 6 May 2012]. Clysta Kinstler's 2005 novel *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple Feet* (originally published in 1989 as *The Moon Under Her Feet*) incorporates the Isis and Osiris story in its fictional treatment of Magdalene. Clysta Kinstler, *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple* (Llandeilo: Cygnus Books, 2005).

[56] *The Gospel of Mary*, p. 472.

while the Saviour speaks.[57] On asking permission to 'speak in openness', a representation which has parallels with the conceptualizations of Mariam and Mariamme in the *Dialogue of the Savior* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* respectively, the Saviour praises her as the 'blessed one' whose 'heart is raised to the kingdom of heaven more than all [her] brethren'. He also promises to 'perfect [her] in all mysteries'.[58] Though at this point 'Mary Magdalene' is only an editorial gloss for the female follower who is ascending to a contemplative level above the other disciples, a number of explicit references to Mary Magdalene (as well as to Mary, the mother of Jesus) are made in the body of the text. In the second book, for example, the Saviour promises that while his 'twelve ministers' will remain in his company, 'Mary Magdalene and John, the Virgin, will tower over all men who shall receive the mysteries in the Ineffable'.[59]

In parallel to the representations of the non-canonical Mary(s) as holding such an important position in Christ's circle, this figure is represented as coming into conflict with Peter. In the first book of the *Pistis Sophia*, Peter complains of 'Mary' (Magdalene?) that she 'discourseth many times' and 'hath let none of us speak', complaining that 'we will not endure this woman'.[60] A similar representation of animosity between 'Mary' and Peter, and an analogous attempt to block her assumption that she has membership of the group of male disciples, can be found in the *Gospel of Thomas* (dated to the first half of the second century), in which Peter is represented as telling Christ that Mary should 'leave us, for women are not

[57] G. R. S. Mead (ed.), *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Miscellany: Being For the Most Part Extracts from the Books of the Saviour, To which are added Excerpts from Cognate Literature* (London: John M. Watkins, 1921 [Repr. by Lightning Source, 2009]), p. 20.
[58] *Pistis Sophia*, p. 20. See Harold W. Attridge (trans.), *Dialogue of the Savior*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 229-38 and Douglas M. Parrott (trans.), *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 206-228. Both women are represented as asking the Saviour some questions and the *Dialogue of the Savior*'s Mariam is described as having spoken 'as a woman who knew the All' (p. 235).
[59] *Pistis Sophia*, p. 193.
[60] *Pistis Sophia*, p. 47.

worthy of Life'.[61]

It is in the *Gospel of Mary*, though, that this conflict, a conflict which is only ever implicit in the New Testament gospels, is played out most dramatically. While Peter initially asks Mary to 'tell us the words of the Saviour which you remember', encouraging her to share her insight with the disciples and acknowledging that she possesses deeper knowledge than the male disciples, he changes tack after Andrew tells his brethren that he does 'not believe' Mary's testimony.[62] On hearing Andrew's doubts about the wisdom imparted to Mary, Peter switches allegiance, asking why the men should 'turn about and all listen to her'. His question of why Christ would choose to 'speak privately with a woman' resonates with the descriptions in the gospel of Luke of how the male disciples perceived the women's testimonies to be 'madness' (24. 11).[63] It should be noted that the speeches and discussions that are often a feature of gnostic texts are vehicles for teaching particular doctrines and refuting other doctrines. Here the hypothesis of spiritual authority or revelation granted to a female is broached but then refuted.

Though there might or might not be a direct relationship between the Marys of the canonical and non-canonical gospels (though not one that would be known to medieval writers), recent novelists, especially feminist novelists, have often chosen to incorporate the gnostic / apocryphal material in their fictional treatments of Magdalene, and to draw from these particularly their more pro-feminine elements and implications.[64]

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[61] Thomas O. Lambdin (trans.), *Gospel of Thomas*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 117-130, p. 130. Significantly, the Saviour's response is that Mary will be made 'male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven' (p. 130). This statement can either be read as antifeminist and gynophobic or, more positively, as calling into question the essential binarism between the sexes and the justification of oppression on the grounds of biological difference.

[62] *Gospel of Mary*, p. 472 and p. 473.

[63] *Gospel of Mary*, p. 473.

[64] See, for example, Marianne Fredrikkson, *According to Mary Magdalene*, trans. Joan Tate (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1999) and Ki Longfellow, *The Secret Magdalene* (New York: Random House, 2007).

5. The Construction of a Medieval Mary Magdalene Biography

Having provided an overview of the Marys / Magdalenes of the gospels, it is necessary next to examine the complex construction of a medieval Magdalene biography. This section will discuss the emergence of the legend prior to the construction of the thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea* (or *Golden Legend*) Magdalene *vita*.[65]

Referring to the early emergence of Mary Magdalene textual and non-textual traditions in England, Sherry Reames writes that:

> […T]he cult of Mary Magdalen must have begun in Anglo-Saxon times, as witnessed by the presence of her feast day in Bede's martyrology (c. 720) and in early monastic calendars. The entry for her in the *Old English Martyrology* (c. 900) already shows a knowledge of her *vita eremitica*, and Exeter Cathedral claimed to have one of her relics as early as the tenth century.[66]

Some manuscripts of Bede's *Martyrology* and the *Old English Martyrology* already mark July 22 as Mary Magdalene's feast day.[67]

The *Old English Martyrology* provides a brief account of her life beginning with an account of the 'sinner in the city' material (an account which makes no reference to sexual sin) and the narrator relates that this figure was 'so dear to Christ […] that after his resurrection he appeared to her first of all people'. It is said that after the Ascension Magdalene:

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[65] Since a number of critics have already discussed in significant detail the emergence and development of a medieval Magdalene biography, I provide only a pithy overview. Victor Saxer's French scholarship was pioneering in surveying the transmission of the different narrative traditions in Latin. David Mycoff, Sherry Reames and Katherine Jansen have also covered this material, and Mycoff's work has been especially useful to my discussion. See David Mycoff, 'Part I: Patristic and Medieval Legends of Mary Magdalene', in William Caxton, *A Critical Edition of the Legend of Mary Magdalena from Caxton's Golden Legende of 1483*, ed. Mycoff, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies 92.11 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1985), pp. 4-41; David Mycoff, 'Introduction', in Pseudo-Rabanus Maurus, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Mary*, trans. and ed. Mycoff, Cistercian Studies Series 108 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1989), pp. 1-23; Sherry Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen, Penitent and Apostle: Introduction', in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Reames, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), pp. 51-7; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*.

[66] Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen', p. 52.

[67] Felice Lifshitz, who writes that there is 'no critical edition, indeed no real edition at all, of this martyrology', provides a modern translation of Bede's text. This translation does not contain an entry for Magdalene's feast day. See Bede, *Martyrology*, trans. and with an introduction by Felice Lifshitz, in *Medieval Hagiography: an anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 169-97, p. 174 and pp. 179-97 (pages of translation).

> had such a great longing after [Christ] that she could no longer look on any man; but she went into the desert and lived there thirty years unknown to all men.[68]

During her time in the desert, Magdalene is described as having been visited by angels and as experiencing the mysteries of levitation. She is found after thirty years by a holy priest.

Although Magdalene appears in Old English literature, many of the legends about her originated outside England and circulated predominantly in France from the abbey of Vézelay (which had been governed by the Benedictines of Cluny after 1026).[69] The abbacy of Geoffrey in the eleventh century developed and expounded the cult of Magdalene. Having been at Cluny, Geoffrey would have been familiar with the important Pseudo-Odo of Cluny sermon (detailed below), suggesting a Cluniac connection to the emergence of Magdalene's cult at Vézelay.[70] In 1058 Vézelay was officially recognized as possessing the saint's relics, and legends like the *Vita apostolico-eremitica* (also described below) confirmed her association with the abbey.[71] Owing to this association with Magdalene, Vézelay was to become an important centre of pilgrimage for medieval Christians, including devotees who hoped to be 'dispossessed of their devils'.[72]

The account of Mary Magdalene's time in the wilderness first appeared in the *Vita eremitica*, a ninth-century text borrowing from Mary of Egypt's Greek *vita*.[73] Mary of Egypt is one of several female saints (others include Pelagia and Thaïs) who belong to the tradition that Benedicta Ward (1987) calls 'harlots of the desert'.[74] Haskins describes this Mary as a

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[68] George Herzfeld (ed.), *An Old English Martyrology*, EETS O.S. 116 (London: Trübner, 1900), p. 127.
[69] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 113.
[70] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 114.
[71] For further discussion of the importance of Vézelay, see Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 36, p. 38 and p. 39. For an account of Magdalene's association with France (as well as the different texts relating to the translation of her relics and the monastic rivalries between Vézelay and Saint-Maximin), see Raymond Clemens (2000): Raymond Clemens, 'Introduction', in 'The Cult of Mary Magdalen in Late Medieval France', ed. and trans. Clemens, in *Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Head, pp. 655-74.
[72] See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 115.
[73] Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen, p. 51. For an eleventh-century text of the *Vita eremitica*, see J. Misrahi (ed.), 'A Vita Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae (*BHL*, n. 5456) in an Eleventh Century Manuscript', *Speculum* 18 (1943), 335-9.
[74] Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: a study of repentance in early monastic sources* (London: Mowbray, 1987).

fifth-century saint.[75] An Old English version of her legend preserved in a manuscript which also contains Ælfric's hagiographical collection (ca. 1000), relates that:

> a priest named Zosimus entered into the wilderness. There, and in search of a desert father who might provide him with spiritual instruction, he came across a woman deprived of clothing who, after initially fleeing from him, identified herself as 'a poor evil-doer' and revealed knowledge of his name.[76] Zosimus is filled with awe, and even more so later when he sees her 'lifted up, as [if] it were the space of a man's ell, above the earth' (p. 19).
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> Zosimus asks the woman to 'tell [him] all things about [herself], that [she may] manifest the wondrous doings of God' (p. 21). This woman tells Zosimus the story of how she moved from Egypt to Alexandria after beginning to despise the love of her family and there she 'polluted [her] virginity' and for seventeen years engaged in fornication, neither sleeping with men for 'presents' nor because she 'receive[d] anything' from these encounters (p. 23). When she saw a number of people running towards the sea, she decided to join their journey to Jerusalem (not because she wanted to show 'reverence for the Holy Rood', but because she anticipated having the 'more associates in the passion of [her] desires', p. 25). Aboard the voyage, the woman engaged in many 'evil deeds' (p. 27), 'compelling to sin both the wretches who were willing and the wretches who gave [her] money' (p. 27). When the party arrived in Jerusalem, the woman was shocked to find that she could not enter the temple because the 'vengeance of God barred the door' (p. 29). She cried bitterly until she saw a vision of the Virgin and realized that she must never again 'pollute [her] body with the dire lust of evil fornication' (p. 31). The woman was then able to enter the temple and to see all manner of 'spiritual mysteries' (p. 33). After hearing a voice outside the temple that told her to 'pass over the river Jordan' and to find 'good rest' there (p. 33), she entered into the wilderness where, prior to meeting Zosimus, she lived for forty-seven years, the first seventeen of which were spent fighting against 'manifold perils' (p. 39).
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> The remainder of the legend tells of how the sinner began uttering the words of the scriptures and of Zosimus' shock that she had never learned these words but had heard them from God. Zosimus prostrates himself before her and she asks him to partake in the 'Lord's Body and Blood' a year later during Easter (p. 43).
>
> When that time arrives, the woman receives the 'holy mysteries, Christ's Body and Blood, with extended hands' (p. 47) and asks Zosimus to return again in a year. Zosimus regrets that he has not asked the saint her name. A year later, Zosimus returns to the spot and finds the woman's lifeless body and sees a written message in the earth telling him to 'bury and compassionate the body of Mary' (p. 51). He does so with the help of a wild beast. Zosimus returns to his minster and relates 'all the things that had seen or heard' (p. 53).

While elements of the Mary of Egypt story might seem familiar to a reader familiar with Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1469-70), where a male sinner, Lancelot, is the

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[75] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 111.

[76] Rev W. W. Skeat (ed.), *Death of St. Mary of Egypt*, in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: being a set of sermons on saints' days observed by the English church*, EETS O.S. 94 and 114 (London: Trübner, 1890-1900), II. 2-53, p. 15. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

protagonist, the account of a Mary who repents of her sins and enters into the wilderness was to become an integral part of medieval Magdalene hagiography. Indeed, a parallel can be drawn with the account in Malory's 'The Sankgreal' of how Lancelot, having committed sexual transgression by engaging in an adulterous relationship with Queen Guinevere, was so 'overtakyn with synne […] that he had no power to ryse agayne the holy vessell'.[77] Similarly to Mary of Egypt, his lack of cleanness initially prohibits him from partaking in the mysteries, though both figures repent and are able to experience (in Lancelot's case only partially) what they have desired so much.

The tenth century saw two new developments to the emergence of a standard Magdalene biography. First, a sermon attributed to Odo of Cluny (ca. 878-942) collated the three New Testament women into a continuous legend, which, as David Mycoff has observed, 'contains nearly all major points which later writers touch on regarding the first half of Mary's career, and it establishes an order […] that is seldom departed from'.[78] Known as the *Vita evangelica*, this homiletic text refers to the relevant passages from Luke 7, Mark 16, Luke 10, and John 20, but also quotes from the Song of Songs (on the Bride seeking her Beloved) and Mark 2 (in which Christ refers to having come to call sinners and not the just).[79] Further, the sermon provides Magdalene with a noble lineage, in keeping with the aristocratic elevation typical of most contemporary *vitae.*[80] Reference is made to 'Magdala castello', which was to play an important role in later Middle English versions of the legend.[81]

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[77] Sir Thomas Malory, 'The Sankgreal', in *Le Morte Darthur*: *or The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of Hys Noble Knyghtes of The Round Table: authoritative text, sources and backgrounds, criticism*, A Norton Critical Edition (New York; London: Norton, 2004), pp. 496-587, p. 518.
[78] Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 13. See Reames on the collation of these women into 'a single narrative *vita*'. Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen', p. 51.
[79] Pseudo-Odo of Cluny, 'Sermo II: In Veneratione Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae', in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina* 133, ed. J. –P Migne, pp. 713-21, p. 719 and p. 713.
[80] On this see Ingrid Maisch, *Mary Magdalene: the image of a woman through the centuries*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 46.
[81] Pseudo-Odo, 'Sermo II', p. 714.

The second major development was the contemporaneous production of the *Vita apostolica*, which told of Magdalene's expulsion from Palestine and preaching in Provence.[82] The *Legenda aurea* draws on this narrative when it recounts a derivative story about Magdalene's preaching in Marseilles, describing how Magdalene and other Christians were put to sea to be drowned but arrived by God's intervention in Marseilles, a topos or 'meme' that will recur frequently in Middle English hagiography and also features in several romances, as Helen Cooper has noted.[83]

Probably during the eleventh century the *Vita apostolica* was added to the *Vita eremitica* to create the *Vita apostolico-eremitica*.[84] This narrative brought together the traditions of Mary Magdalene's preaching in Provence and her later contemplative life. A further conflation took place when the *Vita apostolico-eremitica* was added to the Pseudo-Odo of Cluny sermon (the *Vita evangelica*) to form what Saxer called the *Vita evangelico-apostolica*, a narrative account which combined 'the story of the Magdalen's life before the ascension with the story of her journey to Gaul and activities there'.[85]

A final stage contributing to the construction of a medieval Magdalene biography was the emergence, probably in the twelfth century, of the story of the prince of Marseilles. This account describes the Magdalene's conversion of a prince and his wife, and shares parallels

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[82] Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 14 and Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 38-39. Reames suggests contemporaneity with Pseudo-Odo's sermon. Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen', p. 51. For a copy of the *Vita apostolica*, see Guy Lobrichon (ed.), *Le Dossier Magdalénien aux Xle-Xlle Siècles. Èdition de Trois Pièces Majeures*, in *Mélanges de l'Ecole français de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps Modernes T. 104*, 1 (1992), 163-80, (164-9).

[83] Cooper refers to the Magdalene legend in her chapter 'Providence and the sea: "No tackle, sail nor mast"'. Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 106-136.

[84] A version of the legend can be found in manuscript BHL 5443-5448. Mycoff notes that Ètienne-Michel Faillon 'considers the part drawn from the *Vita eremitica* an addition' and reproduces it in *Monuments Inédits Sur L'Apostolat de Sainte Marie-Madeleine en Provence et Sur Les Autres Apôtres De Cette Contrée, Saint Lazare, Saint Maximin, Sainte Marthe* (Paris: J. –P Migne, 1848), II. 445-51. Mycoff, 'Introduction', p. 26.

[85] Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 14. For a copy, see 'Vie Anonyme Seinte Marie-Madeleine', in Faillon, *Monuments Inédits*, II. 437-45.

with the Apollonius of Tyre story.[86] Mycoff speculates that the text known to and cited in Saxer's study as the *Postquam Dominus N. I. C* might have been 'a collaboration of sorts' between Provençal writers of romance and hagiographers.[87]

To sum up, then, many elements which were to feature in the Middle English Magdalene legends were already in existence prior to the composition of the thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea.* The traditions of Magdalene's early life and later preaching and contemplation in Gaul had a long and complex history, and had already been woven together over time from a multitude of different sources.

6. The *Legenda Aurea*'s Magdalene Legend

By far the most important development in the construction of the Middle English Magdalene legends was the composition in the 1260s of the *Legenda Sanctorum* (*Readings on the Saints*) by Jacobus of Voragine, which was to become so popular that it was known by the title *Legenda aurea* or *Golden Legend*. While it is probable that the primary purpose of the *Golden Legend* was to collate material pertinent to preaching and teaching, it appealed to a wider audience including individual lay readers and writers in England.[88] The legendary was one of the most important sources for knowledge of the saints during the Middle Ages, and was translated into a number of different languages, including by Chaucer, whose *Second Nun's Tale* (ca. 1392-5) is based on Jacobus' account of Cecilia, as he acknowledges in the prologue.[89] Other examples of the *Legenda aurea*'s influence, direct or non-direct, include

[86] Cooper, making reference to the narrative account pertaining to the 'wife and child of one of [Magdalene's] converts, apparently dead in childbirth', has noted that the 'story offers a Christian analogue of the apparent death in childbirth of the wife of Apollonius of Tyre'. Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 121. For a copy of the Apollonius of Tyre legend, see Robert D. Stevick (ed.), *Apollonius of Tyre*, in *Five Middle English Narratives*, The Library of Literature (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 37-97.
[87] Mycoff, 'Introduction', p. 6. The account can be found in BHL 5457.
[88] William Granger Ryan cites A. Boureau's argument that preachers were likely to comprise the main readership, and especially those from the Dominican Order. William Granger Ryan, 'Introduction', in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: readings on the saints*, trans. Ryan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), I. xiii-xviii, p. xvii.
[89] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Second Nun's Prologue*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 262-3, VIII. 84-5.

Langland's (ca. 1332-86) B-text of *Piers Plowman*, Caxton's (ca. 1422-91) references to Mary Magdalene, Anastasia and Katherine in his *Book of the Knight of the Tower* (1484), and the fourteenth-century *Stanzaic Life of Christ*.[90]

Many of the Middle English hagiographers make explicit the influence of the legendary on their writings: John Mirk in his prologue to the *Festial* collection comments that: 'in helpe of suche mene clerkus as I am myselff I haue drawe this treti sewyng owt of *Legenda Aurea* wyth more addyng to'; the heading of the *Gilte Legende* relates that: 'This book is compiled of the lyues of seyntes, callid yn Latyn *Legenda Aurea*'; and Osbern Bokenham's Mary Magdalene legend alludes twice to 'Ianuence' [Jacobus de Voragine], as well as to 'legenda aurea' and 'Ianuensys legende'.[91]

The influence of Jacobus' Latin Magdalene legend on the Middle English Magdalene *vitae* was enormous. Of the ten extant Middle English Magdalene legends (excluding the Digby *Mary Magdalene* play), Mycoff speculates that only two have as their source a text unrelated to the *Legenda aurea*: the *Speculum Sacerdotale* legend and the earliest version of

[90] Richard Hamer has pointed out the influence of the *Golden Legend* on these writings by Chaucer and Langland. See Richard Hamer, 'Introduction', in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace (New York; London: Penguin, 1998), pp. ix-xxxi, p. xxii. See also M. Y. Offord, 'Introduction', in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. William Caxton, ed. Offord, EETS S. S. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. xi-xlvii, p. xli and *A Stanzaic Life of Christ: compiled from Higden's Polychronicon and the Legenda aurea*, ed. Frances A. Foster, EETS O. S. 166 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1926).

[91] John Mirk, '[Prologue]', in *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Susan Powell, EETS O. S. 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), I. 3; Richard Hamer (ed.), with Vida Russell, heading to the *Gilte Legende*, EETS O. S. 327 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I. 3; Osbern Bokenham, *The prolocutorye in-to Marye Mawdelyns lyf; The prologe of marie maudelynys lyf; and Lyf of Marye Maudelyn, in Bokenham's Legendys of Hooly Wummen,* ed. Mary S. Serjeantson, EETS O.S. 206 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 136-72, l. 5734, l. 5748, l. 5273 and l. 5387. All further references are to these editions and are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

the *South English Legendary* legend.[92]

In view of this, it will be useful to offer a summary of the *Golden Legend*'s life of Mary Magdalene. The *Legenda aurea* Magdalene legend, after a preliminary discussion of the etymologies of 'Mary' and 'Magdalene', is as followed:

> Mary [Magdalene] was a nobly-born woman, 'descended of royal stock' [*ex regia stirpe descendentibus*].[93] She and her brother Lazarus and sister Martha divided their lands between them and she gained Magdalum, a 'walled town [*castrum* (p. 629)] two miles from Genezareth' (p. 375). While Martha looked after the siblings' estates prudently, 'Magdalene gave herself totally to the pleasures of the flesh [*deliciis corporis* (p. 629)] and Lazarus was devoted to the military' (p. 375). After Christ's Ascension, the family put all their possessions for sale and gave the money to the apostles.
>
> Magdalene was 'very rich, and sensuous pleasure keeps company with great wealth' (p. 375). She became known as ''the sinner'' [*peccatrix* (p. 629)] because of the 'way she gave her body to pleasure' (p. 375). One day, however, she was guided by 'the divine will' to the house of Simon the leper (p. 375). She washed Christ's feet with her tears and Simon the Pharisee thought 'that if [Christ] were a prophet, he would never allow a sinful woman [*peccatrice* (p. 630)] to touch him' (p. 376). Christ rebuked Simon for his pride and 'told the woman her sins were all forgiven' (p. 376).
>
> Christ showed Magdalene many signs of love [*tanta signa dilectionis* (p. 630)]: 'He cast seven devils [*septum demonia* (p. 630)] out of her, set her totally afire with love [*amore* (p. 630)] of him, counted her among his closest familiars, was her guest, had her do the housekeeping on his travels, and kindly took her side at all times' (p. 376). He raised Lazarus from the dead because he loved her [*dilectione*, p. 630] and 'freed Martha from the issue of blood' (p. 376). According to Ambrose, Magdalene was the person who 'chose the best part' (p. 376). Further, when Christ was crucified, Magdalene 'stood beside the cross' and 'prepared the sweet spices with which to anoint his body' (p. 376). She was also, according to Ambrose, the person 'to whom the risen Christ first appeared, making her an apostle to the apostles' (p. 376) [*cui Christus resurgens primo apparuit et apostolorum apostolam fecit* (p. 631)].

[92] See Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 41. With the exception perhaps of the Digby play, the account of the Magdalene's legend in the early fifteenth-century *Speculum Sacerdotale* differs most from the *Legenda aurea.* This text omits discussion of the apostolic life in Provence and the Prince of Marseilles story. It also leaves out the material relating to Magdalene's aristocratic birth and inheritance. Similarly to the account in the *Old English Martyrology*, Magdalene is described as entering into the wilderness straight after the Ascension, though this sermon account does contain a number of the miracle stories. See Edward H. Weatherly (ed.), *Mary Magdalen*, in *Speculum Sacerdotale*, EETS O.S. 200 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 170-4. There are two different versions of the *South English Legendary* Mary Magdalene legend (the *South English Legendary* and *Early South English Legendary* versions). While Mycoff refers to Manfred Görlach's argument that neither the earlier nor later versions of the Mary Magdalene legend demonstrate any evidence of *Legenda aurea* influence on the collection, Mycoff claims to be 'less certain' that the *South English Legendary* Magdalene legend is not influenced by the *Legenda aurea* Magdalene account. See Mycoff, 'Part I', pp. 29-30, p. 30.

[93] William Granger Ryan's translation is based on the second edition (1850) of Th. Graesse's 1845 modern Latin text of the *Legenda aurea*. See Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Mary Magdalene*, in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, I. 374-83, p. 375. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis. The Latin translation is provided from Iacopo de Varazze, *De Sancta Maria Magdalena*, in *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2nd edn (Florence: SISMEL, 1998), pp. 628-42, p. 629. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

Fourteen years after Christ's passion, the 'disciples went off into the lands of the various nations and there sowed the word of the Lord' (p. 376). Many of the Christians, Magdalene included, were put to sea by unbelievers in 'a ship without pilot or rudder' (p. 376) but by providence they arrived in Marseilles (p. 376). Nobody in Marseilles would give the Christians shelter so they 'took refuge under the portico of a shrine belonging to the people of that area' (p. 376). Magdalene saw the people coming forth to sacrifice to the idols [*ydolis* (p. 631)] 'and preached Christ fervidly to them' (p. 376). All the people were amazed by her 'beauty, her eloquence, and the sweetness of her message' (p. 376) [*Et admirati sunt uniuersi pre specie, pre facundia, pre dulcedine eloquentie illius* (p. 631)]. She also managed to dissuade the governor of that province [*princeps prouincie* (p. 631)] and his wife from sacrificing.

A few days later Magdalene provided the wife with a visitation and asked her: ''Why, when you are so rich, do you allow the saints of God to die of hunger and cold?'' [*Quare, cum tot diuitiis abundetis, sanctos dei fame et frigore mori permittitis?* (pp. 631-2)]. The lady refused out of fear to tell her husband about the vision. On the second night, Magdalene appeared again to the wife, but she was too frightened to tell her husband and did not assist the poor Christians. On the third night, Magdalene appeared to each of them, 'shaking with anger, her face afire as if the whole house were burning' (p. 377) and admonished them for their lack of charity. The couple were terrified by her strongly-worded message and, on the wife's say-so, therefore 'provided shelter for the Christians and supplied their needs' (p. 377) [*Quapropter ipsos hospitio receperunt et eis necessaria ministrauerunt* (p. 632)].

One day when Magdalene was preaching [*predicaret* (p. 632)], the governor asked her if she could defend her faith. She replied: ''I am ready indeed to defend it […] because my faith is strengthened by the daily miracles and preaching of my teacher [*magistri* (p. 632)] Peter, who presides in Rome!'' (p. 377). The governor agreed to do what Magdalene said if she could 'obtain a son' for himself and his wife (p. 377). Magdalene prayed to God and the lady was granted a son.

The governor decided to visit Peter. He was going to go alone, but his wife 'insisted, doing as women do' that he take her on the journey (p. 378). They left their possessions with Magdalene and went to sea. On board the ship, the lady went into labour during a terrible storm and 'expired as she brought forth her son' (p. 378). The child could not lactate and the governor lamented that he had 'yearned for a son' only to lose 'the mother and the son too' (p. 378). The seamen wanted to throw the body overboard, but the governor dissuaded them from doing so and placed the corpse and the child on a hilly coast nearby. Having done so, the governor cried out to Magdalene to watch over the child and spare him his life.

On arrival at Rome, Peter reassured the governor and then took him to Jerusalem and showed him some of the holy places. Two years passed, and the governor returned to the hilly coast where he saw that his son was alive. He, therefore, begged Magdalene to 'restore [the child's] mother to life and health' (p. 379), saying that he believed without any doubt that she could do this through prayer since she had granted and kept safe the child. The wife breathed and opened her eyes and said that Magdalene had been her 'faithful handmaid' when she had given birth (p. 379) and that she had been her 'guide and companion' in the years when the governor had been with Peter (p. 379), showing her all the places Christ had 'suffered, died, and [been] buried' (p. 379). The wife says in fact that she and Magdalene had been with the governor and Peter in Jerusalem.

The governor and the lady returned to Marseilles, where 'they found blessed Mary Magdalene with her disciples, preaching' [*Mariam Magdalenam cum suis*

> *discipulis predicantem* (p. 636)]. They were baptized by Maximin and destroyed all the idols. Lazarus was made bishop of Marseilles and Maximin of Aix (p. 380). Magdalene, 'wishing to devote herself to heavenly contemplation' [*superne contemplationis* (p. 636)], moved into the wilderness (p. 380). While there were no 'streams of water there, nor the comfort of grass or trees' (p. 380), she was spiritually nourished: every day 'at the seven canonical hours', she was visited by angels and experienced levitation (p. 380).
>
> A priest who had constructed a cell nearby was given a special vision by God to see Magdalene being lifted into the air. He tried to go forward to see her, but 'when he was a stone's throw from the spot, his knees began to wobble, and he was so frightened that he could hardly breathe' (p. 380). Since he was denied the possibility to experience the 'heavenly secret' (p. 380), he called three times on Magdalene to tell him about herself. She revealed herself to be Mary the Sinner [*peccatrice* (p. 637)] and asked him to tell Maximin that she would soon die and that a year from now he should 'go to his church, and there he [would] find [her] present and waited upon by angels' (p. 381).
>
> A year later at Easter, Maximin finds Magdalene among a choir of angels. Her face is described as being 'radiant' and gazing upon her is more difficult than looking 'straight into the sun' (p. 381). Magdalene receives the Eucharist from Maximin and lies down before the altar. At the moment of her death, there is a 'powerful [odour] of sweetness' [*odor suauitatis* (p. 638)] that lasts seven days (p. 381).

There follows a discussion of the translation of the relics and several miracles performed by Mary Magdalene after her death, alongside some miscellaneous material. Relevant to the argument in the next chapter are the narrator's sceptical comments regarding the tradition that Magdalene was jilted by John the Evangelist.[94]

Jacobus, therefore, incorporates the different narrative traditions outlined in the chapter, and his protagonist, who is conceptualized as the composite saint of Gregorian tradition, is depicted variously as noblewoman, first witness, preacher in Provence, and hermit in the wilderness. His version of the Magdalene legend, with some significant additions and omissions, provides a model for Magdalene's biography as it is represented in my three core texts: the *Festial* (ca. late 1380s), the 1438 *Gilte Legende*, and the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (completed by 1447).

[94] Mycoff, discussing different versions of the post-Ascension life, refers to a tradition in some accounts of the Ephesian legend (a legend which circulated mainly in the East) that 'John and the Magdalen were engaged to be married before Christ called John away to be his disciple'. See Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 7.

7. The Texts of the Thesis

The thesis, as noted above, concentrates on three examples of vernacular Magdalene hagiography: John Mirk's *Festial*, Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, and the anonymous *Gilte Legende* (once tentatively associated with Bokenham, but very recently linked speculatively to Dame Eleanor Hull, ca. 1390-1460).[95]

It also draws on other versions of the Middle English Magdalene *vitae* (the *Early South English Legendary*; *South English Legendary*; *Speculum Sacerdotale*; *North English Legendary*; *Scottish Legendary; Auchinleck*; and William Caxton's *Golden Legende*); versions of the legend in Latin and vernaculars other than Middle English (the Pseudo-Rabanus Maurus *Life of Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*; Nicholas Bozon's Norman French *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*; and Pseudo-Cavalca's Italian *Life of Saint Mary Magdalen*); and dramatic and non-dramatic versions of the legend from the late-medieval and Early Modern period (the Digby *Mary Magdalen* play; Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentance*

[95] Manfred Görlach, referring to his 1972 discussion of Bokenham's once-lost translation of the *Legenda aurea*, writes: 'The collection has not been found, and must be considered lost. All attempts to identify the lost work with the *Gilte Legende* are inevitably doomed to failure'. Manfred Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, Anglistische Forschungen; Bd. 257 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1998), p. 63. For discussion of Bokenham's legendary, see footnote 109. In 2012, Richard Hamer suggested that the author might have been a woman and raised the possibility of translator Dame Eleanor Hull. He acknowledges that this argument for attribution is only conjectural. See Richard Hamer, 'Introduction', in *Gilte Legende*, ed. Hamer with Vida Russell, EETS O. S. 339 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), III. 1-56, pp. 51-6.

of Marie Magdalene; and Thomas Robinson's *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*).[96] A brief overview of the insular legends, medieval and post-medieval, is provided in the appendix.

The reason for selecting as core texts those versions of the legend found in the *Festial*, *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is that they show varying degrees of correspondence to the *Legenda aurea* account and are composed for a variety of readers and audiences.

The *Festial*, dated by its most recent editor Susan Powell to around the later 1380s, is a sermon collection designed for parish priests for reading out to a possibly illiterate congregation (a social group that Judy Ann Ford's 2006 study describes as comprising 'common people rather than a social, political, or educational elite').[97] Ford, referring to Alan Fletcher's description of the collection as 'a homiletic "bestseller", has noted that the text appears to have been the most prolific Middle English sermon collection.[98] The cultural production of the collection is interesting, since the sermons, following an early recension,

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[96] See: John Mirk, *De Sancta Maria Magdalena sermo breuis*, in *John Mirk's Festial*, I. 184-88; *St Mary Magdalen*, in *Gilte Legende*, I. 469-80; Bokenham, *Lyf of Marye Maudelyn*, pp. 147-72; Reames (ed.), *Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalen*, in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, pp. 59-89; Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill (eds), *De sancta Maria Magdalene*, in *The South English Legendary*, EETS O. S. 235 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), I. 302-315; *Mary Magdalen*, in *Speculum Sacerdotale*, pp. 170-4; Carl Horstmann (ed.), *De sca Maria Magdalena, historia*, in *Die nordenglische Legendsammlung des Ms Harl. 4196 (und Ms Cott. Tiber E. VII)*, in *Altenglische legenden*, *neu folge* (Heilbronn: Gebr Henninger, 1881 [Repr. Ann Arbour, Michigan University Library, 2006]). Available at: http://quod.lib.umich/edu/c/cme/browse [accessed 7 August 2013]; Pseudo- Barbour, *Magdalena*, in *Barbour's des Schottischen Nationaldichters Legendensammlung*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Verlag von Gebr. Henninger, 1881 [Repr. *BiblioBazaar*]), pp. 123-37; Carl Horstmann (ed.), *aus MS. Auchinl. Edinb. Advoc. Libr*, in *Sammlung Altenglische Legenden* (Heilbronn: Verlag Von Gebr. Henninger, 1878 [Repr. BiblioLife Reproduction Series]), pp.163-70; William Caxton, *Legend of Mary Magdalene*, in *A Critical Edition of the Legend of Mary Magdalena*, ed. Mycoff, pp. 116-44; Pseudo-Rabanus Maurus, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Mary*, trans. Mycoff; Nicholas Bozon, *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*, in *Three Saints' Lives by Nicholas Bozon*, ed. and trans. Sister M. Amelia Klenke (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1947), pp. 3-25; Pseudo-Cavalca, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalen*, trans. Valentina Hawtrey (London: John Lane: 1904 [Repr. General Books, 2009]); Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall Jr (eds), *Saint Mary Magdalen*, in *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodelian MSS.Digby 133 and E Museo160*, EETS O. S. 283 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 24-95; Lewis Wager, *The Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene: A Morality Play*, ed. Frederic Ives Carpenter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904 [repr. Kessinger Legacy Reprint]); Thomas Robinson, *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene: a legendary poem in two parts*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, EETS E.S. 78 (London: Trübner, 1899). All further references are to these editions and are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

[97] Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), p. 13.

[98] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 9.

were 'comprehensively rewritten' after 1434 for an audience of greater sophistication.[99] It is relevant to my discussion that Powell, citing her argument from 1981, notes that the revision (post-1434) leaves out criticisms of the wealthy.[100] While, as chapter four discusses, the *Festial* account of the Mary Magdalene legend is unusual in omitting the avaricious prince scene, containing admonishment of the uncharitable rich, Powell's edition of the *Festial* collection uses as its base text 'the earliest of the extant manuscripts (certainly for the main hand)'; Powell has also confirmed in private correspondence that the Mary Magdalene text in her edition is 'the closest to the original, as far as one can tell'.[101]

The *Gilte Legende* of 1438, the first complete Middle English translation of the *Legenda aurea* material, via Jean de Vignay's *Légende Dorée*, was produced for 'symple lettrid men and women' to read or hear read, and has been described by Manfred Görlach as reflecting the taste for private reading (and that shift also reflects probably an increase in the number of readers over a half century).[102] The *Festial* thus assumes a public presentation, aloud, to a group of parishioners; the *Gilte Legende* author envisages additionally that a pious individual might read the collection of saints' lives in private. Richard Hamer's argument that the legendary might have a female author is informed by the euphemistic nature of the translation and the 'additions of women to the text where they might be thought to have been gratuitously left out' in the French source.[103] Chapter four questions why Magdalene appears in two dream visions to the princess alone and, though a

[99] Susan Powell, 'Introduction', in *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. xix-clv, p. xix.
[100] Powell, 'Introduction', p. liv.
[101] Powell, 'Introduction', p. cxx; private correspondence with Susan Powell [email received: 20 September 2012].
[102] Richard Hamer says that '*Gilte Legende* […] is a close translation, with a few additions and omissions, of Jean de Vignay's *Légende Dorée*', but the main additions and omissions listed do not refer to the Magdalene legend. Hamer refers to the author simply as the '''synfulle wrecche'' (hereafter s. w)' alluded to in a colophon to one of the manuscripts. Richard Hamer, 'Editorial Procedures', in *Gilte Legende*, ed. Hamer, I. xi-xvi, p. xii. For reference to the intended audience, see the prologue to *Gilte Legende*: Richard Hamer (ed.), ['untitled prologue'], *Gilte Legende*, I. 3. See also Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, p. 65. Görlach's argument that the *Gilte Legende* is representative of the turn from 'listening to recited stories and towards individual reading' and shows the 'new middle-class' interest in 'encyclopedic [sic] prose with a taste for rhetorical poetry' does seem to jar with the idea in the prologue that men and women can 'encrese in vertue bi the offten redinge *and hiringe* of this boke'. See p. 65 and p. 3 (my emphasis).
[103] Hamer, *Gilte Legende*, pp. 51-2 (p. 52).

standard trope in Magdalene's medieval biography, it is an interesting coincidence that Dame Eleanor Hull, a woman from a 'substantial family', was herself servant to a widowed queen (who would thus have had responsibility for important decision making).[104]

The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, completed by 1447, was produced for an elite readership including a number of influential female patrons such as Isabel Bourchier, ca. 1409-84 (to whom the Magdalene *vita* is dedicated).[105] Bokenham, an Augustinian friar, dedicates a number of his narratives to noble laywomen. Sheila Delany has argued that the lives in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* echo the lives in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. Having pointed out some 'surprising' omissions in Bokenham's choices of women saints – not least the Virgin Mary; Monica, the 'mother of the claimed founder of [Bokenham's] order'; and any saint closely associated with East Anglia (including Petronilla, daughter of Saint Peter) – Delany suggests that Bokenham's choices can be explained by placing the collection in dialogue with Chaucer's collection of saints' lives.[106] Thomas Burgh, one of Bokenham's patrons, put together the manuscript containing the Magdalene text for a nunnery.[107]

Both the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Festial* have recently received increased critical and scholarly attention in the wake of the publication of the new EETS edition of the *Festial* by Susan Powell and modern English translation by Delany of the *Legendys of Hooly*

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[104] Hamer, 'Introduction', III. 52.
[105] See Sherry Reames' brief description of the Middle English legends 'that were composed for an elite readership and display considerable literary ambition'. Sherry Reames, 'General Introduction', in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints,* ed, Reames, pp. 1-22, p. 8.
[106] Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 38-9 (p. 38).
[107] Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 23.

Wummen.[108] A manuscript recently found in Abbotsford House, the library of Sir Walter Scott, is believed to be Osbern Bokenham's lost translation of the *Legenda aurea*.[109]

Part Three: The Critical Field

Having outlined in the last section my choice of primary texts, this part of the discussion surveys and situates my thesis in terms of critical work in the field. Since Magdalene was honoured in the late-medieval period as a saint, this thesis contributes to scholarly analyses of hagiography and hagiology. It can be categorized in terms of work on medieval saints and aspects of their cult. I am specifically interested in medieval literature on Mary Magdalene, but some studies of medieval saints have chosen to focus on aspects including pilgrimage or iconography.

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[108] See Osbern Bokenham, *A Legend of Holy Women: A Translation of Osbern Bokenham's Legends of Holy Women*, trans. Sheila Delany, Notre Dame texts in medieval culture (Notre Dame, Indiana; London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). Examples of recent critical studies on Mirk and Bokenham include: Susan Powell, 'John Audelay and John Mirk: Comparisons and Contrasts', in *My Wyl and My Wrytyng: Essays on John the Blind Audelay*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 2009), pp. 86-111; Alexandra da Costa, 'From Manuscript into Print: The *Festial*, the *Four Sermons* and the *Quattuor Sermones', Medium Aevum* 79:1 (2010), 47-67; Sheila Delany, 'Matronage or Patronage? The Case of Osbern Bokenham's Women Patrons', *Florilegium* 16 (1999), 97-105; Caroll Hilles, 'Gender and Politics in Osbern Bokenham's Legendary', in *New Medieval Literatures 4*, ed. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 189-212; Simon Horobin, 'Politics, Patronage, and Piety in the Works of Osbern Bokenham', *Speculum* 82:4 (October 2007), 932-49; Gabriella del Lungo Camiciotti, 'Discoursal Aspects of the *Legends of Holy Women* by Osbern Bokenham', in *Methods of Historical Pragmatics*, ed. Susan M. Fitzmaurice and Irma Traavitsainen (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter (2007), pp. 285-305; and Karen A. Winstead, 'Osbern Bokenham's "englische boke"': Re-forming Holy Women', in *Form and Reform: Reading Across the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Shannon Gayk and Kathleen Tonry (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), pp. 67-87.

[109] Simon Horobin describes this recent discovery in 'A Manuscript Found in the Library of Abbotsford House and the Lost Legendary of Osbern Bokenham', in *English Manuscript Studies: Volume 14. Regional Manuscripts 1200-1700*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2008). He refers to Bokenham's allusion in his *Mappula Angliae* to 'the englische boke' which he had 'compiled of legenda aurea and of oþer famous legendes' (p. 137) and suggests that a manuscript listed in an 1838 catalogue of the Abbotsford House collection as *Legenda Aurea Sanctorum* (p. 130) is very likely to represent this lost legendary. As well as providing a case for similarities between this work and Bokenham's description of his previously-lost translation, Horobin's article is interesting since it discusses the Magdalene legend. According to Horobin, the Magdalene's *vita* in the Abbotsford manuscript (like eight of the other lives in this manuscript) is the same as the version found in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (p. 139). There are changes, however, to the preface to the legend since the 'prolocutorye' containing reference to Isabel de Bourchier is omitted (p. 141). Horobin is not certain as to the order of the revisions and whether the lives in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* were 'composed at the request of Bokenham's patrons, or whether Bokenham added dedications to already-existing works in response to specific commissions' (p. 153).

A study of the medieval Magdalene is both like and unlike the study of another female saint. My thesis is that Magdalene *counters* dominant gender, social, and sexual norms, and a similar argument could be put forward about many saints of the *Legenda aurea*. Magdalene is not unique, among male or female saints, in confronting authority figures, and chapter two discusses an episode in which Cecilia acts in a way that is unruly. Nevertheless, Magdalene exists beyond the realm of medieval hagiography, and remains highly visible in present-day consciousness. Unlike later saints, she is unusual in having experienced a direct relationship with Christ. In this way, Magdalene is more like the Virgin (another exceptional female figure) or the Twelve. Though Saint Katherine is described as entering into spiritual marriage with Christ, Magdalene is distinctive from most other saints in having known Christ during his time on earth. She is also depicted as a central witness to one of the formational events of Christian history: the Resurrection.

Below I discuss the history of, and contemporary currents in, saints' studies, pointing out commonalities with approaches in this thesis. While there are a number of different currents in the recent study of hagiography, one of the dominant strains involves an investigation of saints and gender, and my thesis, though not only concerned with gender politics, contributes to work in this area. The chapter then moves on to survey some of the critical and creative work on Magdalene(s), before closing with discussion of research into the medieval Magdalene cult and literature.

1. Never Mind the Bollandists: The Rise of Saints' Studies

In his 1887 introduction to the *Early South-English Legendary*, Carl Horstmann wrote that:

> I know most Englishmen consider it not worth while [sic] to print all these Legends; I know they regard them as worthless stuff, without any merit, because [these people] are wholly absorbed in questions of the day, of politics.[110]

This understanding of hagiography as 'worthless stuff' – as antithetical to pressing social and political issues – continued to hold weight until relatively recently. It is only since the 1990s that the discipline, or at least the versions of the discipline popular in literary studies today, has become well-established.

Mary-Ann Stouck, referring to her experience of researching hagiography in the 1960s, has commented that she had the feeling of 'treading on near-virgin ground'.[111] While Stouck claims that since the 1960s the study of hagiography has been 'pursued with ever-increasing zeal by growing numbers of academics', the scholarship produced between the 1960s and late 1980s belongs to a different, earlier, version of the discipline.[112] Patrick J. Geary cites František Graus' 1965 study *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit* as pioneering in showing that hagiography 'must be a privileged source for the study of social values'.[113] Since the 1990s, there has been a movement away from the 'saints and society' approaches found in some earlier historical work.[114]

Though substantively different to the approaches in this thesis, it is worth pointing out some earlier, influential work on the saints. Peter Brown's 1981 *The Cult of the Saints* is an example of historical scholarship focussed on the saints in late antiquity.[115] André Vauchez'

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[110] Carl Horstmann, 'Introduction', in *The Early South-English Legendary,* ed. Horstmann, EETS O. S. 87 (London: Trübner, 1887), pp. vii-xii, p. xi.
[111] Mary-Ann Stouck, 'Introduction', in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, ed. Stouck (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999), pp. xv-xxi, p. xv.
[112] Stouck, 'Introduction', p. xvi.
[113] Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 12.
[114] Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 17.
[115] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages (originally published in 1981 as *Sainteté en Occident aux Derniers Siècles du Moyen Age*) provides historical treatment of issues such as canonization and popular and local sainthood. While comprising only a small section, Vauchez' discussion of feminine sanctity and of Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia (d. 1231) is relevant to my discussion in chapter four. Vauchez argues that the 'essence of the sanctity of St Elizabeth was charity, seen as an active engagement on behalf of the poor', and the Magdalene of some medieval hagiographies is associated with similar principles.[116] Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars*, a third historical study but from 1992, contains a detailed chapter on the saints. This chapter, which alludes to the *Festial*, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Legenda aurea*, discusses among other items devotional practices and the relationship between saint and, in Duffy's term, medieval 'client'.[117]

In literary studies, the interest in hagiography has largely developed since the 1990s. The 1990s saw the founding of the Hagiography Society by Sherry Reames in 1990 and publication of two important anthologies of female saints' lives: Brigitte Cazelles' *The Lady as Saint* in 1991 and Leslie A. Donovan's *Women Saints Lives in Old English Prose* in 1999, while the Early English Text Society (EETS) have reprinted a large number of saints-related publications.[118] A number of texts and studies on the saints have appeared since 2000, EETS publishing new editions of the *Gilte Legende* (2000; 2006; 2007; 2012), the

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[116] André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge;New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 374.

[117] See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 155-205, p. 183.

[118] See 'Hagiography Society' > www.hagiographysociety.org [accessed 7 August 2013]: Brigitte Cazelles (ed.), *The Lady as Saint: a collection of French hagiographic romances of the thirteenth century*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); and Leslie A. Donovan, *Women Saints Lives in Old English Prose / translated from Old English with introduction, notes and interpretive essay* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999).

Festial (2009; 2010) and *Three Alliterative Saints' Hymns* (2003).[119] TEAMS (the consortium for the teaching of the Middle Ages) has published two anthologies of saints' lives – *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* in 2003 and *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections* in 2004 – and Sarah Salih edited the *Companion to Middle English Hagiography* in 2008, while Thomas Head produced a student-orientated anthology of saints' lives in 2000.[120] The cult of saints is a visible topic on many medieval history syllabi, and a number of pre-modern literature courses incorporate, for example, discussion of gender and sanctity.

The discipline of saints' studies and its rise within the academy does not exist in a vacuum and there are a number of different, but frequently connected, reasons for its birth or rebirth. While the website for the *Société des Bollandistes* stresses that for this scholarly group hagiography is not 'a temporary fashion: it has been a tradition for 400 years!', recent work in saints' studies has been very much informed by the changing political and cultural climate of the later twentieth century, rather than the conservative approaches associated with hagiography and hagiographical exegesis.[121] The restructuring of the academic syllabus owing to the successes of second-wave feminism has been largely responsible for an increased emphasis on gender approaches to the text including gay studies and studies in

[119] Reprinted EETS texts pertaining to the saints include: *The Lives of Women Saints* (1998); *Early South-English Legendary* (2000); *Life of St Werburge of Chester* (2002); *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* (2003); *John Capgrave: Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria* (2000); *Old English Martyrology* (2004); *John Capgrave's Lives of St Augustine and St Gilbert of Sempringham, and a sermon* (2001); *Prose Life of Alexander* (1997); *Middle English Stanzic Versions of the Life of St Anne* (2006); *Seinte Marherete* (2001); *Osborn* [sic] *Bokenham's Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (1997); *The South English Legendary* (2004); *Mirk's Festial* (1997) and the *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (2002). See 'Early English Text Society: List of Publications' > www.boydellandbrewer.com/content/docs/2011_Annual_EETS_Catalogue.pdf [accessed 7 August 2013].
[120] Reames (ed.), *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*; E. Gordon Whatley (ed.), with Anne B. Thompson and Robert Upchurch, *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004); Sarah Salih (ed.), *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006); Head (ed.), *Medieval Hagiography: an anthology.*
[121] '400 Years of Bollandist Hagiography', 'Société des Bollandistes' > http://www.kbr.be/~socboll/history.php [accessed 7 August 2013].

medieval masculinities.[122] David Clark's *Between Medieval Men*, for instance, includes treatment of same-sex relations in early medieval hagiography.[123]

Coming out of this and relevant to the emergence of hagiography studies, an abundance of work has been produced which has focussed on intersections between gender and religion. In 1973 Harvard University introduced its esteemed Women's Studies in Religion programme and 1991 saw the publication of Harvard alumna Caroline Walker Bynum's seminal study *Fragmentation and Redemption: essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion*.[124] 1974 saw the introduction of the *14th Century English Mystics Newsletter* (renamed *Mystics Quarterly* in 1984) and 1978 the publication of the first text in Paulist Press' 'Classics of Western Spirituality' series: Julian of Norwich's *Showings*.[125] The interest in the saints can be related to a broader critical interest in forms of (especially feminine) spiritual expression. Medieval critics working in the field of gender and religion post-1990 produced important bodies of scholarship and analysis on a range of subjects which includes female mysticism and the medieval mystics, virginity, visions and sickness, preaching and prophecy, and the different expressions of sanctity available to men and women. Studies of individual saints, of female religious writers including Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342-1416) and Hildegard of Bingen (ca. 1098-1179), and of Beguine mystics like

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[122] For examples of medieval studies in these fields, see Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (eds), *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*, The new Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2000); and Clare A. Lees (ed.), with the assistance of Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, medieval cultures, Vol. 7 (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[123] See the chapter 'Saintly Desire? Same-Sex Relations in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*': David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: male friendship and desire in early medieval English literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 174-94.

[124] 'About the WSRP', 'Women's studies in religion program' > http://www.hds.harvard.edu/wsrp [accessed 7 August 2013]; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion* (New York: MIT Press, 1991).

[125] 'Introduction', 'Mystics Quarterly Online' > http://english.uconn.edu/afflicted_programs/mq/MQ1.HTM [accessed 7 August 2013]; Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). 'The Classics of Western Spirituality' series also includes texts by other well-known medieval figures such as Catherine of Siena (1347-80); Hadewijch (ca. 1250-1310); Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1327); Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153); Richard Rolle (1290 / 1300 – 1349); Hildegard of Bingen; and Walter Hilton (1340/5 – 96).

Marguerite Porete (ca. 1250-1310) and Mechtild of Magdeburg (ca. 1207-82 / 94), developed powerfully in this period.

While the developing interest in gender approaches to texts accounts for the growth in medieval 'women and religion' scholarship, some more expressly feminist work has been produced since the 1990s in medieval studies. This work is most relevant to the approaches applied in this thesis, though, like a number of other feminist critics, I do not only focus on women or so-called 'women's issues'. Having published their first edition of the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* in 1986, E. Jane Burns, Roberta Krueger and Elizabeth Robertson founded the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship with Thelma Fenster in 1992.[126] 1993 saw the publication of *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*; and in 1994 *Feminist Readings in Middle English: the Wife of Bath and all her Sect* was published.[127] That some medieval critics were choosing to employ and foreground a feminist methodology has had ramifications in the field of saints' studies. In her 2000 study *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography*, Gail Ashton draws on French feminism to argue that 'female hagiographical texts are inherently fissured and unstable texts', containing with 'them […] a doubled discourse, the "heard" and dominant, intended [voice] – masculine – and a feminine voice that reveals itself *differently* that puts pressure on the masculine generic one'.[128] Unlike some other recent hagiographical studies, Ashton's study is explicitly informed by contemporary feminist theory.

While my thesis has more commonality with a study like Aston's, some medievalists have chosen to focus on representations of male saints. In their introduction to 2002 volume *Gender and Holiness*, Samantha J. Riches and Sarah Salih acknowledge the importance of

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[126] 'History', 'Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship' > http://smfsweb.org/history/ [accessed 7 August 2013].

[127] Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (eds), *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (eds), *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: the Wife of Bath and all her sect* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

[128] Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint,* Routledge research in medieval studies; 1 (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

attending to male, as well as women, saints, and Riches (like Jonathon Good in 2009) has elsewhere produced a full-length study of the cult of Saint George.[129] Though masculinities constitutes an important strain of hagiography studies, Katherine J. Lewis wrote as recently as 2012 that the 'emphasis on female saints in some of the existing scholarship can give the impression that male saints were of less interest […] to the laity, when there were numerically far more male saints'.[130] As discussed below, some more theoretical research into medieval male saints has also intersected with the currents of saints' studies interested in queerness.

Since the 1990s especially debates in gender studies have often focussed on transgressions of gender; deviance; victim politics; and the problems of complicity; and perhaps for these reasons the lives of the female virgin martyrs have proved an especially popular branch of study. 1997 saw the publication of Karen Winstead's influential study *Virgin Martyrs*, which employs gender and political approaches to late-medieval hagiographical texts.[131] Though Winstead examines among other issues some representations of the female martyrs as insubordinate women in conflict with male authority figures, her study is also concerned with reading the representations of these women in light of a changing socio-political moment. She sees the movement into the fifteenth century as coinciding with a more conservative representation of the virgin martyr.

That the virgin martyrs have proved especially popular with critics in saints' studies can also be related generally to the growing emphasis in University syllabi placed on analysis of sex and sexuality. Since the 1990s feminist and queer theory have often gone hand-in-hand

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[129] See Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih, 'Introduction. Gender and holiness: performance and representation in the later Middle Ages', in *Gender and Holiness: men, women and saints in late medieval Europe,* ed. Riches and Salih, Routledge Studies in medieval religion and culture; 1 (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-8, p. 3. See also Samatha Riches, *St George: hero, martyr and myth* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005) and Jonathon Good, *The Cult of Saint George in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2009).

[130] Katherine J. Lewis, 'Male Saints and Devotional Masculinity in Late Medieval England', *Gender & History* 24 (1 April 2012), 112-133 (p. 119).

[131] Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

(as, indeed have men's studies and queer theory) and have also intersected with work being done in cultural studies. Consequently, discussions of topics including pornography, BDSM, intersexuality, the erotic, and drag have become important areas of critical debate. Critical interest in sex and sexualities is reflected in some recent studies in the field: Virginia Burrus' 2004 *The Sex Lives of Saints: an erotics of ancient hagiography* reads hagiographical texts from late Antiquity in light of theories pertaining to the '''queer'', the ''sadomasochistic,'' and the ''seductive''', and Queer@Kings has recently (May 2012) hosted a 'Sex and the Sacred' symposium, exploring among other topics intersections between hagiography and pornography.[132]

Discussions of erotics and / or queerness constitute important areas of research into the saints. Some of the more theoretical work produced on the saints (whether literary or visual representations) has been focussed in these areas. Bill Burgwinkle's and Cary Howie's 2010 study *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture* provides exploratory treatment of medieval and post-medieval texts and images. One of their interests lies in the idea of the verge, the subtitle to the study, and the closing paragraph also applies this concept to the situation of the reader ('Try not to grasp. Try to stay on the verge. […] Read – *touch* – like your life depended on it').[133]

Simon Gaunt's and Robert Mills' work has more in common with some of the approaches applied in this thesis. Both present the potential of queerness as a discursive, as well as a sexual, category. Gaunt's discussion of *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine* and *Silence* 'queers' the texts: Gaunt argues that 'if we choose to be "queer" readers, we can locate "queer" wishes, made visible as they are repudiated by narrators who simultaneously enact

[132] Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: an erotics of ancient hagiography*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 13; 'May 2012: Sex & the Sacred Symposium', 'King's College London' > www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/ahri/centres/q@k/eventsarchive/sexsacred.aspx [accessed 7 August 2013].
[133] Bill Burgwinkle and Cary Howie, *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture: on the verge*, Manchester medieval literature and culture (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 186.

and disavow them'.[134] He also contends that the 'mechanisms by which homosexuality is repudiated guarantee and produce a heterosexual matrix, but they fail to occlude what they seek to repress'.[135] This method of reading disruptions shares certain parallels with some of Sinfield's approaches in *Faultlines*.

Robert Mills, whose article on male martyrdom cites Gaunt, opens his discussion by describing 'queering' as a 'method of contestation' that involves 'read[ing] against the grain of conventional critical practice'. This practice involves exposing the 'regularory hierarchies that define and qualify the heterosexual imperative as normal' but also those texts that 'subvert, transgress, or even repudiate' regulatory hierarchies.[136] Mills also refers briefly in 2005 study *Suspended Animation* to the possibility for 'queer, counter-hegemonic' readings, asking whether the reader-critic should 'dare to pose the question "what if?", and in its answering raise the spectre of queerness in relation to sacred symbolism'.[137] Though my thesis is not invested in analysing representations of homo-/hetero-sexuality (chapter two does explore the related topic of normative gender), to some extent I also 'queer' the texts: my study offers 'against the grain' or counter- readings and, in chapter three, brings to the fore some ideas that the medieval hagiographies raise but suppress.

There has also been a growing interest in medieval studies in virginities and virginity theory (an area of study associated with the work of Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau and Kathleen Coyne Kelly), and the emergence of this field in part explains the popular focus in saints' studies on the figure of the virgin martyr. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's important 2001 study includes chapters on the 'Virgin Estate', 'Honorary Virginities', and 'Virgin Authority and its Transmission'; and Winstead's anthology *Chaste Passions* (published in 2000) comprises

[134] Simon Gaunt, 'Straight Minds / "Queer" Wishes in Old French Hagiography: *La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, with the assistance of Kathy Lavezzo (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 155-73, p. 167.
[135] Gaunt, 'Straight Minds/ "Queer" Wishes', p. 169.
[136] Robert Mills, '"Whatever you do is a delight to me!" Masculinity, Masochism and Queer Play in Representations of Male Martyrdom', *Exemplaria* 13. 1 (2001), 1-37, (3 and p. 2).
[137] Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reakton Books, 2005), pp. 177 and p. 178.

modern English translations of eighteen female virgin martyr legends.[138] Though virginity studies and hagiography studies are separate disciplines, they have strengthened the rise of the other.

Overall, then, an emerging interest in the medieval cult of saints has coincided with the broader theorization of gender and sexuality, and a rise from the 1990s of explicitly feminist work in medieval studies (an example being E. Jane Burns' memorably-titled 1993 essay 'This Prick Which is Not One', which examines the ways 'in which female protagonists "speak from the body" in Old French fabliaux'), as well as work on masculinities, queerness and erotics.[139] Given that medieval hagiography provides a compendium of transvestite saints, virgin martyrs, prostitute saints, and saints who transgress normative gender boundaries, the genre has become an important site of analysis for medieval critics working in fields related to gender, sexuality and and body politics. Though it is not uncommon to come across historical and archaeological scholarship on relics, pilgrimage, miracles and saints' cults in material culture, the literary-historical and literary-critical versions of the discipline have often been more dominated by gender or theory approaches (or indeed a combination of the two).

My thesis can thus be situated in terms of the explicitly feminist work being done in saint studies, and it also shares certain parallels with some approaches being applied in queer medieval studies. In 'Whatever you do is a delight to me!', Mills, discussing his methodology, writes:

> I am pressing for a slightly more "hopeful" approach to interpretation than paranoid reading practices generally allow for, one which identifies the transgressive possibilities in as unlikely a location as medieval Christian orthodoxy – even if that does ultimately run the risk of wishful thinking on the part of the medieval commentator (but should the heteronormative paradigm so often projected onto

[138] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, c. 1150-1300: virginity and its authorizations* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Karen A. Winstead (ed. and trans.), *Chaste Passions: medieval English virgin martyr legends* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
[139] E. Jane Burns, 'This Prick Which is Not One: How Women Talk Back in Old French Fabliau', in *Feminist Approaches to the Body*, pp. 188-212, p. 195.

> readings of medieval texts and images not be similarly "wishful" in some instances, and why should we not at least attempt to identify the potential for reparative, wishful thinking in medieval modes of looking, reading, and imagining?).[140]

Mills articulates here some issues of interest to this study and particularly to chapter three (which provides a deconstructive reading that discerns the texts' 'potentially transgressive' treatment of spiritual authority). The conclusion discusses the politics of reading, and this passage from Mills also shows that interpretation can be politically-motivated. His reference to 'reparative, wishful thinking' opens up questions about the role of the reader or critic, and these questions are of relevance to this thesis. Indeed, the conclusion touches on the issue of why present-day readers might want to interpret the Magdalene of medieval hagiography as a counter-heroine.

2. The Rise of Interest in Mary Magdalene

In her 2000 study, Katherine Jansen, employing a phrase used by Victor Saxer, argues that the 1990s 'seem to be the true era of ''Magdalenian fermentation'''.[141] Jansen makes reference to the body of work produced on Magdalene, medieval and non-medieval, in Europe (for example, Lilia Sebastiani's 1992 *Tra/Sfigurazione* and the collection of essays produced by the École Français de Rome) and to Haskins' 1993 study *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*.[142] Haskins' seminal study, incorporating consideration of literary and artistic representations of this figure throughout the ages, certainly represents a significant contribution to Magdalene scholarship.

Since the publication of Jansen's monograph, a number of further influential studies have been produced on the figure of Magdalene. In addition to some of the more popular studies which have emerged as a result of the *Da Vinci Code* (2003) phenomenon, Jane

[140] Mills, 'Whatever you do is a delight to me', pp. 3-4.
[141] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 14.
[142] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 13.

Schaberg and Ann Graham Brock have provided scholarly analyses of the Magdalene(s) of the gospels in relation to themes of gender and religious authority.[143]

Schaberg provides theoretically-adventurous treatment of Magdalene and her study shows the ways that the figure can be employed for particular gender and political motivations. *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* combines Virginia Woolf scholarship, feminist theological reconstruction, and political method. While concentrating more on the representation of Mary (Magdalene?) in the canonical and non-canonical gospels, Schaberg includes discussion of the sexual politics of some other, later legends relating to Magdalene (including the *Legenda aurea*'s Magdalene legend).[144] Though not focussed on hagiography or medieval literature, Schaberg's study shares certain similarities with the work in the thesis. *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* is not, or at least not mainly, a literary-critical study, but it is written from a feminist perspective, explores ideas of gender and power, and acknowledges the location of the critic.[145] Schaberg argues for the potential of 'Magdalene Christianity' as a 'religion of Outsiders'.[146]

Less unusual but crucial to debates about gender, power and apostolicity, Brock's study considers the different representations of Mary Magdalene and Peter across a range of canonical and non-canonical texts. Also relating to themes of gender and religion but concentrating more specifically on the role of storytelling and oral culture in the construction of the Mary Magdalene gospel accounts is Holly E. Hearon's 2004 *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities.*[147] A 2002

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[143] See Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle* and Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*.
[144] Schaberg's overall take on the *Legenda aurea* and the *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* is that the texts present Mary Magdalene as 'the most extraordinary woman', but represent her at the service of 'patriarchal ideology and structures'. Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 98.
[145] Schaberg writes, for example, that '[a] feminist framework requires that the researcher examine and re-examine how and why she is reading, and let her reader know also'. Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 259.
[146] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 19.
[147] Holly E. Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

collection of essays *Which Mary?*, edited by F. Stanley Jones, considers the relation between Mary Magdalene and the different Marys of the apocrypha.[148]

Recent Magdalene criticism has sometimes had an overtly political (often feminist) focus. In these studies, discussion of Mary Magdalene's identity as holy woman, disciple, or apostle has occasionally allowed for comment on women's institutional authority in the Church today.[149] The political subtext of some Magdalene scholarship has sometimes led to a more personally meditative style of writing, Schaberg describing Mary Magdalene as the 'madwoman – angry mad – in Christianity's attic' and Hooper's *Crucifixion of Mary Magdalene* beginning with a dedication to his 'sisters': 'all of the women of the world who continue to suffer oppression at the hands of men. May you, like Mary, one day become free'.[150] Even analyses of Magdalene which are more traditional in approach often reveal active critical and political commitments. Haskins ends her cultural history with the statement: '[o]n 11 November 1992 the General Synod of the Church of England voted to ordain women as priests'. Having referred earlier to Marina Warner's work on the Virgin Mary, she also concludes that 'in losing the myth of Mary Magdalen […] our culture [….has] everything to gain'.[151]

Contemporary novels, particularly those written from a feminist angle, have been grounded in some of the debates found in recent Magdalene criticism. Without wishing to homogenize the different texts and approaches, many of the novels share certain similarities and can be compared in some respects with Marion Bradley's 1982 highly influential *Mists*

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[148] F. Stanley Jones (ed.), *Which Mary?*

[149] See, for example, the closing statement of Brock's study: 'Looking back on the past may help us to see with more clarity the possibilities for the future. It is my hope that revealing some of the implicit and explicit challenges to Mary Magdalene's leadership authority will help recover a greater appreciation for her role as first apostle. Furthermore, I hope it will thereby give inspiration and authority to all Christians who, regardless of their gender, may be strengthened by her example to pursue their callings to teach and proclaim the good news of Jesus' love for all'. Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, pp. 174-5.

[150] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 9 and Hooper, *The Crucifixion of Mary Magdalene*, unpaginated.

[151] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 400. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The myth and cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1990).

of Avalon. As in Bradley's feminist 're-visioning' of Arthurian legend, a number of texts combine concern with social and political issues pertaining to women with interest in religious / spiritual themes.[152] Much of the work also shares links with the sort of feminist historical reconstruction associated with writers like Schaberg: the novels contribute to a similar overarching project of re-imagining the Christian testament and traditions. Magdalene is also presented in several of these novels as countering certain limitations traditionally placed on women and as resisting some patriarchal structures. Although there is not a direct relationship between the novels and the hagiographies, in both textual spheres she can be interpreted as a counter-heroine.

In her 2006 preface to *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (published in 1984 as *The Wild Girl*), Michèle Roberts writes that she:

> needed to work out why traditional Catholic theology asserted that single women could not be both sexy and holy, why the male-dominated Church split women into holy sexless mothers and bad sexy whores, why priests and theologians seemed so frightened of women and so determined to keep women in a narrow corner, firmly under control.

Her novel provides explicitly feminist and political treatment of the different legends associated with the composite figure of Mary Magdalene and, as Roberts explains in her preface, appropriates the gospels to create a 'religion of love'.[153] Roberts' Magdalene, a figure who experiences conflict with Peter since she is 'unmarried and [has] chosen to live and love freely', argues for women's participation as priests and for a non-hierarchical model of discipleship.[154]

Roberts' novel shares certain parallels with Marianne Fredrikkson's bestselling *According to Mary Magdalene* (first published in 1997 as *Enlight Maria Magdalena*).

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[152] Marion Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (London: Sphere, 1989).
[153] Michèle Roberts, 'Preface', in *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 9.
[154] Roberts, *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 133. Roberts' Magdalene is described as saying: 'Tell me why I may not be a priest [… and] why I may not go forth and baptise as you will do in the Lord's name. Tell me why I may not offer the supper of the bread and wine as he bade us do' (p. 131). She also tells Peter that she does not 'want to set [herself] up as an authority over other disciples' (p. 129) and that that there should be 'no hierarchy amongst [them]' (p. 130).

Fredrikkson provides a preface in which she describes her Mary Magdalene as the outcome of 'an idea, or rather, a dream, perhaps': that there might be a 'free, clear-thinking person among [Christ's] disciples': someone with 'ears to listen, eyes to see, and a mind to understand'.[155] *According to Mary Magdalene* is concerned with religious authority and with questions relating to the construction of the gospels. Fredrikkson's Magdalene character is depicted in disagreement with the male disciples over the version of Christianity which is to be disseminated.[156] She is also represented as having experienced a sensual relationship with Jesus. The novel shares a concern in those same issues of Christian origins interesting feminist theological scholars.

Providing a different angle, Clysta Kinstler's *The Moon Under her Feet* (1989), published in 2005 under the new title *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple*, considers the Mary Magdalene material from a comparative religions approach, drawing links to the narrative account of Isis and Osiris (as well as Inanna and Dumuzi) and engaging with discourses pertaining to sacred sex.[157] The 2005 edition ends with a mini-essay that discusses the ideas of Merlin Stone, Sir James Frazer and J. J. Bachofen.[158] Here, Kinstler outlines the role of the temple priestess in early Agrarian society and elaborates on the myth of the dying-and-rising god.

Ki Longfellow's *The Secret Magdalene*, also published in 2005, is one of the more sophisticated Mary Magdalene novels.[159] Like Roberts in *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, Longfellow uses the novel format to explore complex (in this instance esoteric) ideas. Her Magdalene is Mariamne: an educated and spiritually-enlightened female figure. *The Secret Magdalene* is concerned with traditions pertaining to gnosticism and in parts reads

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[155] Fredrikkson, 'Why Mary Magdalene?', in *According to Mary Magdalene*, pp. vii-viii, p. viii.
[156] The protagonist, for example, is represented as accusing Peter of changing Christ's message that 'there shall not be woman or man here' to 'you wives, be in subjection to your own husbands'. See Fredrikkson, *According to Mary Magdalene*, p. 98.
[157] Kinstler, *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple.*
[158] Kinstler, 'Afterword: Was Mary Magdalene a Temple Priestess?', in *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple*, pp. 317-23.
[159] Longfellow, *The Secret Magdalene*.

like a philosophical analysis of myth and wisdom.[160] As in a number of the Mary Magdalene historical novels, Longfellow provides a comprehensive bibliography for her readers. The bibliography makes explicit the extensive scholarly research that has shaped the novel (the text is not just based on popular conspiracy theory or New Age beliefs), but also enables her readers to follow up points of interest relating to myth and alternative religion.

Less theologically complex than Longfellow's work is Margaret George's *Mary Called Magdalene* (2002), a historical novel of over 850 pages.[161] Whereas Longfellow, whose narrator comments that '[o]ur lives are a quest for *ataraxia* – philosophical peace of mind', uses the figure of Magdalene to open up questions associated with *gnosis*, George comments in her afterword that she 'tried to create a life likely to have occurred – to make [Mary Magdalene] typical of her time and class, not unusual'.[162] *Mary Called Magdalene* considers the problems faced by women historically, and is clearly informed by gender themes. The allusion, for example, to the different, and unequal, opportunities hypothetically available to mixed-sex twins aged thirteen evokes Virginia Woolf's 1929 musings on the plight of 'Shakespeare's sister'.[163]

Differing from the historical fiction described above, Jennifer Chapin's *A Song of Songs: Mary Magdalene Awakes* (2008) tells of Mary Magdalene's modern reincarnation as 'corporate prostitute' Jenna.[164] It opens by representing the conflict between Peter and Mary Magdalene and moves on to provide consideration of the medieval Cathars and their beliefs. The text incorporates discussion of some of the criticisms directed towards the 'church of the

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[160] For example: 'Seth touches Yeshu's shoulder. ''Yeshu, what say you? Do you agree with Dositheus the world is a creation of the male Demiurge, who is the chief Archon of Evil, and who does not know his mother, Sophia? Or would you say it was the reflection of the Source, which has no gender, and is neither Good nor Evil but endlessly creative?'''. Longfellow, *The Secret Magdalene*, p. 319.
[161] Margaret George, *Mary Called Magdalene* (London: Pan Books, 2004).
[162] Longfellow, *The Secret Magdalene*, p. 78; George, 'Author's Afterword', in *Mary Called Magdalene*, pp. 870-5, p. 871.
[163] George, *Mary Called Magdalene*, pp. 84-5. See Virginia Woolf's speculative discussion of the different realities that would have been faced by Shakespeare and his 'wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith' in sixteenth-century England. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, in *A Room of One's Own/ Three Guineas*, ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 3-103, pp. 42-6 (p. 42).
[164] Jennifer Chapin, *A Song of Songs: Mary Magdalene Awakes* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2008), p. 2.

Rex Mundi, who ruled the material world', but also makes reference to current issues, including 9/11.[165] Like *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *According to Mary Magdalene*, *A Song of Songs* seems intended to contribute to a broader project of imagining a more egalitarian Church associated with Mary Magdalene.[166] Perhaps because Chapin's novel is very recent, it is able to take advantage of (and even comment on) other work produced in the field, one of the characters noting that 'everyone is on the "Christ and the Magdalene married and had kids" bandwagon these days'.[167]

The Da Vinci Code (2003), the most well known of all Magdalene fictions, also provides treatment of political and feminist themes, but in the context of a murder mystery. Like his successor Chapin, Brown steers away from the historical novel format and, in doing so, brings the Magdalene material to a more widespread readership. As well as sensationally representing Magdalene as the Grail, the *Da Vinci Code* raises the possibility that:

> Jesus was the ultimate feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene.[168]

Though the text does not provide scholarly analysis of questions pertaining to women's religious leadership, it presents briefly and for a popular audience the debates about whether Peter or Magdalene was given 'directions to establish the Christian Church' (a topic of enormous importance in the field of contemporary feminist theology).[169]

The recent flood of fictions on Mary Magdalene has often shared significant parallels with critical work being produced on the figure. As in Brock's and Schaberg's studies, there has tended to be an overarching interest in issues of gender, power, and authority. While

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[165] Chapin, *A Song of Songs*, p. 138.
[166] Jenna is depicted in the closing scene as writing a letter to the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, in which she accuses them of having caused 'hatred, division, and discord'. In her strongly-worded letter, Jenna emphasizes the importance of a religion based on love and equality: 'Love is this – it flows like a river out of the heart of Mother Africa who created all of us. She does not distinguish between her children but loves all equally and without reserve'. Chapin, *A Song of Songs*, p. 224.
[167] Chapin, *A Song of Songs*, p. 192.
[168] Brown, *The Da Vinci Code,* p. 334. This possibility is raised in the context of two characters discussing the emphasis placed on 'Mary Magdalene' in the gnostic gospels.
[169] Brown, *The Da Vinci Code,* p. 334.

differences exist across the texts, many (especially feminist) novelists have provided fictional treatment of issues pertaining to spiritual leadership. The personally-meditative tone of some of the Magdalene criticism also finds parallels in a number of the novels, Roberts and Fredrikkson making explicit in their introductions that are grappling with their own questions about the power structures of Christianity. In this way, the figure of Magdalene almost serves to facilitate the authors' own quests for personal enlightenment and wisdom (concepts closely associated with *gnosis*).

3. Recent Approaches to Medieval Magdalene Hagiography

Though thus far saints' studies and (largely theological) Magdalene scholarship have been considered as two separate categories, a number of recent literary / literary-historical studies have included consideration of medieval Magdalene hagiography.

Some earlier studies, namely Helen Garth's *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature* (published in 1950) and Marjorie Malvern's *Venus in Sackcloth* (published in 1975), have also discussed Mary Magdalene's medieval biography. Garth, whose published dissertation provides literary-historical treatment of the medieval Magdalene and her legend, writes that:

> there has been an exposition of what mediaeval writers thought about the identity of Mary Magdalene; what they believed to have been the events of her life; what they imagined about her personality and character; and how they used their subject for the endless symbolism in which they delighted.[170]

Garth's study, while different from the more theoretical work being produced today, is pioneering in surveying medieval literary representations of Magdalene.

Malvern, who argues that '*homo ludens* […] works on the borderline between jest and earnest as he creates […] the Athene-Venus-Magdalen', considers related aspects of

[170] Helen Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1950), p. 107

Magdalene's characterization over time.[171] She traces certain continuities across periods, framing her study with four statements suggesting that: '[p]lus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'.[172] The study concentrates on conceptualizations of Magdalene in the canonical and non-canonical gospels; late-medieval literature (with chapters on the *Legenda aurea*, medieval drama, and the Digby play); Lewis Wager's sixteenth-century *Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene*; and twentieth-century texts (*Jesus Christ Superstar* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*). Malvern's analysis seems particularly interested in representations of Magdalene as a figure incorporating the 'holy harlot', 'goddess of love', 'goddess of wisdom', and 'goddess of fertility'.[173]

While the medieval Magdalene features in some recent studies of hagiography (for example, in Ashton's *The Generation of Identity*), since 2000 three book-length studies on this figure have appeared: Katherine Jansen's *The Making of the Medieval Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*; Theresa Coletti's *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval England*; and Joanne Findon's *Lady, Hero, Saint: The Digby Play's Mary Magdalene*. Although a collection of essays on the medieval Magdalene is forthcoming as part of Routledge's medieval literature and culture series (*Mary Magdalene in Medieval Culture: Conflicted Roles*), Jansen's, Coletti's, and Findon's studies currently represent the most up-to-date studies in the field. Since 2000 Coletti has also published several articles on the Digby *Mary Magdalen* play.

Jansen's study provides literary-historical analysis of medieval Magdalene texts (including the *Legenda aurea*) and contributes to discussions of gender, politics, and sanctity. The author concentrates on sermon literature, often unpublished sermons, and focuses especially on the cult of the late-medieval Magdalene in Italy and Provence. In her

[171] Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, p. 180.
[172] Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, unpaginated.
[173] Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, p. 173.

introduction, Jansen describes the different chapters as providing 'a complete picture of the late medieval cult of the Magdalen, its symbolic meanings, and the uses of sanctity in the Middle Ages', and her study provides almost exhaustive discussion of the different manifestations of the saint's cult.[174] The text employs a historicist approach in using 'the figure of the Magdalen to open up the richly symbolic world of the later Middle Ages'.[175] As well as considering the historical construction of the figure of Magdalene, Jansen examines contemporaneous responses to the saint.

Coletti's *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints* discusses the Digby *Mary Magdalen* play in its literary, historical and theatrical contexts. She describes her method as combining 'the different disciplinary perspectives of literary history and criticism, gender studies, and social and religious history', and her study concentrates on East Anglian religious culture.[176] This study is theoretically informed: it draws on Miri Rubin's work to read Magdalene as a 'complex cultural symbol[…]', who 'generates and attracts a multiplicity of meanings'; refers to the issue of providing 'historical inquiry' in a 'postmodern medieval studies' (issues which are explored by Paul Strohm and Gabrielle Spiegel); provides a reading of 'queer moments in the dramatic action'; and makes reference to the play's 'metatheatricality'.[177] Coletti usually chooses only to engage with period-specific criticism, theoretical or otherwise, by other medieval scholars. Though this study does not analyze the different aspects of the saint's cult, as Jansen's does, it is far-reaching, examining the Digby play in relation to a vast body of contemporaneous religious texts (including non-dramatic hagiography) and in relation to issues of gender and sexuality, drama, and women's spiritual authority.[178]

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[174] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen,* p. 14.
[175] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 3
[176] Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints*, p. 4.
[177] Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints*, p. 2, p. 33, p. 158, and p. 191.
[178] Coletti also acknowledges that her study is not 'a comprehensive study of the saint's cult in late medieval England' and points out that despite some shared interests, the 'literary, critical, and historical goals' of her study and Jansen's 'differ substantively'. Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, p. 20.

The most recent of the studies, Findon's *Lady, Hero, Saint* considers the *Mary Magdalen* play in relation to medieval sacred and, for the most part, secular literature. Findon draws on Julia Kristeva's work on intertextuality and Hans Robert Jauss' discussion of the 'horizon of expectations' to consider overlaps and parallels between the Digby play and other medieval genres including lyric poetry, *fabliaux* and romance.[179] This study, which provides literary-critical analysis of the text, argues for an understanding of the Digby Magdalene as a 'multivalent figure who stands at the confluence of many ideas, images, literary genres, social currents and gender roles'.[180] One of Findon's interests lies in the concept of liminality and the ways in which the text and its protagonist transcend boundaries.

Unlike other recent work on medieval Magdalene literature, this study is not focussed either on a specific text (as in the case of Findon's and Coletti's work on the Digby play) nor on the cult of Mary Magdalene more generally. It is also dissimilar in considering the texts in relation to later literary representations of this figure (including, for example, recent Mary Magdalene novels).[181] Nevertheless, I am also interested in reading the hagiographical accounts horizontally to their historical and literary contexts, and my study examines how some contemporaneous readers and audiences might have responded to the narrative episodes.

Chapter two, next, concentrates on reading the account of Mary Magdalene's sin and repentance in relation to ideas of gender and ambition. The representation in this episode is part of a long tradition of interpreting Magdalene in terms of the penitent sinner from Luke 7. In its discussion of normative gender roles, the chapter contributes to the larger body of feminist and queer work on hagiography.

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[179] Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 9.
[180] Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 13.
[181] While Coletti does acknowledge that 'contemporary versions of Mary Magdalene frequently echo patterns of medieval cultural representation analyzed in [her] study' and her final paragraph discusses two recent films, *Breaking the Waves* and *Elizabeth*, she does not interrogate present-day literary conceptualizations of Magdalene. Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, p. 21 and pp. 230-1.

Chapter Two: '[T]hese women that be vicious/ Are alwais high mynded and ambicious': Disciplining the Unruly Female Figure in the Narrative Accounts of Sin and Repentance

THE UNRULY WOMAN is the undisciplined woman. She is a renegade from the disciplinary practices which would mold her as a gendered being. She is the defiant woman who rejects authority which would subjugate her and render her docile. She is the offensive woman who acts out of her own interests. She is the unmanageable woman who claims her own body, the whore, the wanton woman, the wild woman out of control. She is the woman who cannot be silenced. She is a rebel. She is trouble.

Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: Politics of Confinement and Resistance*, 1993, p. 1.

'There was only one sort of woman, they told me, who roamed around boldly and alone. I understood them to mean: wild beast, in need of taming'.[182] These lines, taken from Michèle Roberts' *Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (originally published in 1984 as *The Wild Girl*) provide important insights into the theme of this chapter. Roberts' Magdalene, here represented as a wayward teenage runaway, is violently disciplined for attempting to construct 'a life' which she could 'call [her] own'. Having run from patriarchal authority figures, believing that her 'strong fleet legs [would carry her] towards freedom and away from the prospect of betrothal and marriage', she becomes the victim of sexual assault.[183] Though her attackers, some travelling merchants, do not succeed in 'taming' her (she is 'brutalized but […] freed' since 'none of the honourable men at home would ever take [her] to wife now'), she is certainly punished for her insubordinate behaviour.[184]

This idea of disciplining unruliness, particularly female unruliness, is one of the core tropes of the Magdalene legend, finding its fullest expression in the episodes depicting Magdalene's move from sin to repentance. In the opening of this narrative episode, Magdalene can be read as confronting hegemonic structures in the field of sexual politics, and yet by its close she is represented as renouncing her unusual female privileges. Chapter

[182] Roberts, *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 15.
[183] Roberts, *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 14.
[184] Roberts, *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 15 and p. 14.

one argues that a defining pattern of the Middle English Magdalene legends involves the containment of the counter-heroic Magdalene, and this pattern can be traced in the narrative account of her repentance. Though there is subversive potential in her conceptualization as an unruly heiress (and a woman who is implicitly outside male rule), the episode of her penance can be understood in terms of the consolidation of traditional gender relations. Mary Magdalene the sinner is contained within the structures of the narrative.

The three texts under detailed examination, the *Festial*, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and, to a lesser extent, the *Gilte Legende*, appropriate the account of Luke's 'sinner in the city' for conservative political and social ends. To employ Stephen Greenblatt's words, this chapter argues that it is possible to trace the 'production and containment of subversion and disorder' in the narrative of sin and repentance.[185] While the sinful Magdalene, like her counterpart in Roberts' novel, can be interpreted as an ambitious female figure (one who has in some respects managed to circumvent the limitations of her sex), her repentance seems to

[185] Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets', in *Political Shakespeare*, p. 29. Sheila Delany has also drawn on the subversion-containment model in her discussion of the politics of Bokenham's legendary. She argues that: '[w]e might say about Bokenham's hagiography, as Greenblatt says of Shakespearean drama, that it "registers the possibility…of its own subversion" (26) and that "the form itself…contains the radical doubts it continually provokes" (45). It accomplishes the former, the possibility of its own subversion, by its authorization of female power, a power manifested in female characters and women patrons. But the radical doubts are still being provoked and still being contained'. Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 199.

correspond with her surrender to definitions of normative female behaviour.[186] Read cumulatively as a group and especially when interpreted through the lens of the *Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene*, where some of the representations have become more explicit, the texts present this figure as choosing to give up her social, economic and sexual agency. Whereas Mary Magdalene the sinner can be read as a counter-heroic figure, her repentance marks a moment of containment in the texts.

Theresa Coletti in her 2004 essay on the Digby *Mary Magdalen* puts forward the argument that in the late-medieval play too the 'dramatic episode [of Mary Magdalene's transgression and seduction in a tavern] privileges questions of social identity rather than sexual sin'.[187] The sinful Magdalene is represented as 'a textbook case for what the respectable late medieval young woman ought not to do', a reading that locates the play within structures for the social and cultural control of females, yet Coletti reads the play as not only concerned with issues of 'feminine moral culpability' but 'with deceptions and

[186] Criticism on medieval hagiography has placed considerable emphasis on the fact that female saints often transcend the restrictions typically placed on their sex. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg has produced a study on this theme: *Forgetful of their Sex: female sanctity and society, ca.500-1100* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998). In her introduction, Schulenburg notes that while certain ecclesiastical authors admired 'some women's special ability to deny or transcend the "natural frailty" of their own sex', others represented the woman who was 'forgetful of her sex' as 'the dangerous "other"' who 'needed to be contained, marginalized, or punished'. (pp. 1, 2). Delany draws on Carol Clover's work on the ambiguous gender identity of the Final Girl of modern horror films to argue that '[t]he female martyr often assumes a number of conventionally masculine prerogatives: she disposes of her financial assets as she sees fit; rejects marriage, parents or children; is verbally aggressive; gives sage advice to the persecutor; and demonstrates her superior logic, rhetoric and sometimes supernatural powers'. Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 189. Also focussing on the virgin martyrs but specifically on the cult of St Katherine, Katherine Lewis argues, in *The Cult of St Katherine*, that this saint 'can be seen in some ways to be "male" in her education' (p. 216). Lewis then moves on to consider male 'anxiety about the educated, and in particular, the teaching woman' (p. 216), suggesting that '[a]ttacks on educated women often entail [the] sense that they are transgressing natural boundaries; roles for men and women which were to have been established at the beginning of time, ever since "Adam delf and Eue span" (pp. 216-7). Closer in scope to the work in this chapter, Karen Winstead focuses on the representations of some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century virgin martyr saints as 'unruly', making the argument that '[b]ecause hierarchies were commonly related to one another […], the virgin martyr's disruption of the gender hierarchy could stand for a spectrum of activities that threatened traditional relations of dominion and subordination'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, pp. 109-110. Findon's introduction to *Lady, Hero, Saint* points out that 'Mary Magdalene's transgression of gender norms in [the Digby play], and her resistance to normative social constructions of medieval femininity' lend themselves to feminist and gender methodological approaches. Her study argues, for example, that the Digby Magdalene, whose narrative shares certain similarities with the Constance stories, can be read as 'an anti-romance heroine' who is able to 'transcend the gender expectations and conventions that might constrain her'. Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 9 and p. 121.

[187] Theresa Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere": The Sociology of Transgression in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*', *ELH* 71 (2004), 1-28 (2).

instabilities of the social order'.[188] Her essay interrogates issues of courtesy and social performance in a period marked by social mobility, and examines the play in relation to late-medieval anxieties about class and status. Focussing on Magdalene's sexual encounter with the gallant Curiosity (a would-be aristocrat who she reads as epitomizing the 'mobility of social identity'), Coletti suggests that 'Mary Magdalene's encounter with sin is refracted through the discourse and spectacle of status and class differences'.[189]

Like Coletti, this chapter examines the ways in which representations of Mary Magdalene's sin might be associated with anxieties about disruptions of social hierarchies. Unlike Coletti, however, my main focus lies in the ways in which the sinful Magdalene can be read as – unintentionally and also intentionally – troubling traditional gender boundaries. While Coletti discusses the ways in which the Digby Magdalene's behaviour is unrespectable for a medieval woman, her analysis is not primarily concerned with transgressions of gender.[190] Instead, the essay is largely focussed on themes pertaining to class and status, and discusses the narrative of Mary Magdalene's sin in terms of the potential unreliability of surface appearances. The essay argues that the seduction scene links Magdalene's 'fall to the category confusion that results from the formation of social and moral identities by an ideology that credited proper appearances, words, and gestures with real social capital'.[191] The play's interest in the 'duplicity of social performance' is interpreted in the context of a

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[188] Coletti, '''Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere''', p. 4 and p. 2.
[189] Coletti, '''Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere''', p. 15 and p. 11. Coletti argues that '[b]y figuring Mary Magdalene's tempter as a gallant, the Digby play invokes a well-developed discourse of social critique that, as far back as the early fourteenth century, had directed opprobrium to youthful men of fashion who wasted ''their substance on vanity above their station'' and projected false images of high status'. This emphasis on Curiosity's performance of high status is developed in the seduction scene where Curiosity, through his use of courtly language, is described as mimicking 'aristocratic expressions of masculine desire' such as those employed by Magdalene's father (pp. 7, 12).
[190] In '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere"', Coletti describes Felicity Riddy's work on conduct literature for young medieval women (p. 1). She argues that while the 'Digby play does not share the explicit rhetorical purpose of modeling behavior shown in the conduct texts examined by Riddy', Mary Magdalene's 'moral demise […] resembles the negative examples offered by female conduct literature' (p. 4). The protagonist is described as 'going around town unsupervised, socializing in taverns, drinking, freely granting her attention to men, [and] consorting with suitors beneath her in social station' (p. 4).
[191] Coletti, '''Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere''', p. 19.

discussion of manners, clothing and sumptuary laws in late-medieval England.[192] Whereas Coletti describes the male gallant Curiosity as 'mimicking [the] manners of the aristocracy', this chapter will focus on the different ways in which Mary Magdalene the sinner, while not exactly mimicking male behaviour, might be considered upwardly mobile in the sense that she rises above certain gendered limitations traditionally restricting her (second) sex.[193]

The first part of the chapter concentrates on the narrative of Mary Magdalene's transgression (the first episode in her medieval biography). After arguing that the texts represent Magdalene as a figure who succumbs to desires of the flesh, it develops this reading by suggesting that Magdalene can be read in terms of Karlene Faith's 1993 definition of the 'unruly woman'.[194] Drawing on the ways in which cumulative representations of Mary Magdalene's social, sexual and economic freedoms trouble notions of normative female behaviour, the discussion argues that the texts conceptualize Magdalene's embracing of a lifestyle of not-feminine privileges as a second (more shadowy, but no less threatening) instance of deviance. The protagonist, particularly as she is imagined by Bokenham and Mirk, can be interpreted as an ambitious female figure: a woman who, owing to a combination of choice and circumstance, possesses a sense of agency more often experienced by a male ruling elite. She can be understood as a counter-heroine in the field of gender politics.

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[192] Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere"', p. 16.
[193] Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere"', p. 7.
[194] Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993), p. 1. Faith argues that: 'The unruly woman of Western societies is a product of the bourgeois imagination and the politics of patriarchal relations. […]. Historically and to the present, her appearance, actions and attitudes have been offensive to the dominant discourses which define, classify, regulate and set penalties for deviance. She is socially constructed as undeserving of the "protections" of the woman who is confined within the parameters of gender conformity' (p. 1). A similar understanding of female unruliness to Faith's can be found in Jane Arthurs' 1999 essay 'Revolting Women: The Body in Comic Performance'. Here, Arthurs reads the unruly woman as one who 'inverts the power relations of gender by breaking the codes of bodily decorum'. Relevant to the discussion in the chapter, she comments that '[t]hese codes in modern societies construct an ideal of bourgeois femininity that demands of "respectable" women an even greater restraint than men in the expression of spontaneous bodily desires. […] In public, any indecorum is a sign of a lack of respectability which, for women, is always a sexual category associated with promiscuity or prostitution'. See Jane Arthurs, 'Revolting Women: The Body in Comic Performance', in *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, ed. Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 137-64, p. 142.

The second part of chapter two moves on to analyse the importance of Magdalene's repentance. Developing from the reading that Mary Magdalene the sinner can be read as disturbing certain gender borders and boundaries, it argues that the narratives that the hagiographers construct about the sinner-turned- penitent can be read in terms of contemporary feminist theories about the construction of normative gender roles. After analyzing the representations of Magdalene's repentance, the discussion suggests that the texts naturalize the 'disciplining and punishing' of a figure whose sin can be interpreted on a number of different levels. Chapter one has suggested that Magdalene shares commonalities and differences with other saints of hagiography, and this part of the investigation compares and contrasts the treatment of Magdalene with the treatment of the unruly female virgin martyrs.

The chapter closes with a consideration of what the representations of Magdalene's repentance might mean for both women and upwardly-mobile factions of late-medieval society. It considers also some of the broader implications of the three texts' emphasis on ideas of contrition and conformity. Pursuing the line of thought that 'literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality', the chapter suggests that the narratives might assist in creating a 'sense of reality' in which dominant hegemonic structures are preserved.[195]

[195] Jean Howard, cited in John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, Transitions (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 3.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a period described by F. R. H. Du Boulay as an 'age of ambition', the cumulative representations of the Magdalene as electing to surrender her range of liberties seem to function at the service of power.[196] The texts, I argue, are implicated in the consolidation of hierarchical structures.

Since the account in Mirk's *Festial* corresponds most closely with my discussion in the chapter, I provide in appendix 2. 1 a synopsis of Mary Magdalene's life in sin and repentance (until she is exorcized of her demons) as it is represented by Mirk. As noted in the previous chapter, a number of differences exist within the various Magdalene *vitae*: the account in the *Festial* is not identical in its content to the narrative in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* or the version in the *Gilte Legende*. Nonetheless, the three texts can be read together as components of a broader Middle English hagiographical tradition depicting Mary Magdalene's sin and repentance.

Part One: Conceptualizing Deviance in the Narrative Accounts of Sin

1. The Woman who Sinned with her Body

Though this chapter concentrates on reading Magdalene's sin in terms of her unruly and ambitious behaviour, it will begin with an exploration of the most literal representations of transgression: the hagiographical images of Mary Magdalene as the woman who sinned with her body. This conceptualization of Magdalene is based on her association with the 'woman taken in adultery' and Mary of Egypt (two figures described in the first chapter), but also

[196] Du Boulay applied the term 'age of ambition' to the 'upward class movements' taking place in the 'late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in England', and the notion of increased social mobility, especially after the Black Death, has generally been accepted by social historians. Philippa C. Maddern, however, has cautioned recently that 'throughout the period 1200-1500 successful careerists were the exception, not the rule, and that for the vast majority of people social *im*mobility remained the norm'. Though 'successful careerists' may have been numerically few, they and their upward trajectories still represented an important presence and perception in late-medieval society. See F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Nelson, 1970), p. 66 and Philippa C. Maddern, 'Social Mobility', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 113-33, p. 133.

relates to her medieval association with Lazarus. Like Magdalene, the Lazarus of the Middle Ages was a composite figure. Since Lazarus was depicted as a leper, and leprosy shared many of the same symptoms as syphilis, Magdalene's association with this figure contributed to her broader medieval association with 'sins of the flesh' and more specifically with prostitution.[197]

While the thirteenth-century *Early South English Legendary* specifies that Magdalene engaged in sexual activity with men and received financial reward for doing so, the three texts under consideration here leave open the question of Magdalene's prostitution.[198] Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* introduces the possibility that Magdalene could have traded her body for monetary gain (a reading which is refuted in Bozon's *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*), but the *Festial* and *Gilte Legende* do not address the issue of sexual transaction.[199] In these two texts, the allusions to Magdalene's sexual sin are especially oblique. The reader might reasonably deduce that Magdalene pursued sensual relationships with many men, but the texts neither spell out unequivocally that she engaged in casual sex or that she was a prostitute by trade.[200] Angela Carter, referring to Mary Magdalene's identity as 'Venus in sackcloth', has commented:

> Note how the English language doesn't contain a specific word to describe a woman who is grown-up, sexually mature and *not* a mother, unless such a woman is using her sexuality as her profession.[201]

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[197] The medieval Magdalene was associated with Lazarus of Bethany because of her conflation with Mary of Bethany. Luke 16. 19-31, however, represented another Lazarus, who 'lay at [a rich man's] gate, covered with sores' (16. 20) and these sores could be understood as signs of leprosy. Jansen, who also refers to this link between Mary Magdalene and the beggar from Luke, has discussed the association between leprosy and prostitution, and Mary Magdalene's medieval identity as 'supreme patron of lepers'. See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 113 and pp. 173-6 (p. 175).

[198] Describing the sinful Magdalene, the *Early South English Legendary* narrator writes that: 'Manie riche men hire leighen bi and geven hire gret mede' (l. 54).

[199] See Bozon: 'Ele out assez a despendre; / Ne pechea pas pur loer prendre' ['She had plenty to spend / She did not sin to obtain recompense.'] (ll. 24-5).

[200] Although it is certainly implied that Magdalene was promiscuous (she committed fleshly lusts), the extant Middle English texts rarely make this point in explicit terms. Unlike in the *South English Legendary*, which states that Magdalene, having being jilted by John the Evangelist, 'forsok [not] þe meste wrecche' (l. 20), it is uncommon to come across any reference to Magdalene having had sexual partners.

[201] Angela Carter, 'Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene', in *Burning your Boats: Collected Short Stories* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 409-13, p. 409 and p. 410.

Carter's implication that *prostitute* is an umbrella term applied indiscriminately to (single) sexually-active women without children is relevant to an understanding of the Middle English Magdalene *vitae.* While the three texts, reflecting misogynistic attitudes towards female sexuality, suggest that Magdalene prostituted herself to men (she was lusty and, as the *Festial* shows, unmarried), they do not say that she engaged in sexual activity for money.

Whereas some recent literature and scholarship on Magdalene concentrates on challenging the whole tradition of the saint as a sinner and whore, this chapter provides a different angle in its analysis of the figure described by the *Legendys of Holy Women* as 'comoun' (l. 5405), a term discussed below, and by the *Festial* as having engaged in fleshly lusts.[202] Rather than repeating well-known arguments that representations of Magdalene's sexual sin demonstrate a (perhaps intentional) distortion of biblical narratives, the focus here lies on the ways in which Magdalene's implied promiscuity, and even prostitution, contribute to understandings of her problematic gender role. Though it is indisputable that the hagiographers have inherited, and are working within, a tradition of antifeminism, the discussion in this chapter moves beyond the popular contention that images of Magdalene as a woman who sinned with her body undermine her special status in early Christianity (a status which is discussed in the next chapter).[203] Instead, it argues that hagiographical conceptualizations of Magdalene in terms of sex and sin exploit medieval, and indeed modern, anxieties about unruliness and transgression (particularly in women), indicating a need for disciplining or correction. The chapter contributes to the thesis' broader, overarching argument: that Magdalene, a figure who is presented in conflict with various hierarchical fields, is contained by different structures in her narrative. Below I shall elaborate the

[202] See Hearon's category of Magdalene scholarship: '"Mary Magdalene, Not a Sinner" (studies […] demonstrating that Mary Magdalene is not the woman of Luke 7:36-50 or Mary of Bethany)'. Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition*, p. 3, n. 7.

[203] This is the approach most associated with Dan Brown's popular novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). In this text, Teabing responds to Sophie's suggestion that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute with the argument that: '"Magdalene was no such thing. That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church"'. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 328.

different representations of Magdalene's life in sin, before moving on to consider her sin vis-à-vis theories of female deviance.

The *Festial* conforms to the long tradition of representing Magdalene as a sinner and a woman who can be understood as having committed sexual sin. After introducing this figure as the daughter of a 'grete lorde' and having 'comyn of kyngus blode', the narrator notes that her father possessed three 'lordeschep[s]': one in Jerusalem that was given to Lazarus after his death, another in Bethany which his daughter Martha inherited, and 'Magdaleyn Castele wyth alle þe lordschep [which] he 3af to Mary'. Moving on to describe how she was expected to marry Iohn euaungeliste (John the Evangelist), the *Festial* says that 'Criste badde Iohnn sewond hym and lyuon in maydenhed; and so [he] dud'. The result of being jilted by her prospective husband, and perhaps a reaction to his vow to keep his virginity, is that Magdalene becomes so 'wroth' that she chooses to give herself:

> al to synne and namely to lechery, insomyche þat scho loste þe name of Magdaleyne and was kallyd 'þe synful womman' (p. 184).

In the *Gilte Legende*, the narrator associates 'habundaunce of thingges' with the fall into bodily sin. Suggesting a connection between 'delytes of the body' and an excess of 'richesse', the text says that 'in as moche as she [Mary Magdalene] shined more in beauute and richesse, so moche more she [ma]de her body sogette to delites' (p. 469). As in the legend of Saint Pelagia, one of the repentant sinners with whom Magdalene is compared in the opening lines of the *Scottish Legendary* (l. 25), the hagiographer implicitly associates Magdalene's bodily (and thereby presumably sexual) delights and her attachment to earthly goods. In both these texts, the implication is that earthly luxury, especially when it is combined with beauty, is the breeding ground for bodily sin. Though the narrator of the *Gilte Legende* does not elaborate on the appearance of a wealthy and materialistic Magdalene (a

gap is left for the reader), William Caxton's 1483 Pelagia is described as being adorned with 'gold and silver and precious stones'.[204]

At the end of the *Gilte Legende*, the narrator claims, almost as an afterthought, that: '[s]um sayen that Mari Mauudeleyn was wedded to Seint Iohn the Euuangeliste and that oure Lorde called hym from the weddynge'. In line with the tradition found in the *Festial* that Magdalene's sin was the result of being estranged from her fiancé, the *Gilte Legende* raises the possibility that 'for despite that oure Lorde hadde take awaye her husbond' Magdalene 'gaue her bodye to alle delite of the flesshe'. The text does not confirm this tradition that because Christ took her 'fro the flesshely delite, he fulfelled her withe souerayne heuenly delite that was withe his owne loue' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 479), but it is significant to note that it omits the lines from the *Legenda aurea* relating that the accounts of Mary Magdalene's relationship with John the Evangelist are 'false and frivolous' (*Legenda aurea*, p. 382). The narrator of the *Gilte Legende* leaves open the possibility that being jilted by John the Evangelist led to Mary Magdalene committing fleshly sin.

While the *Festial* and *Gilte Legende* offer relatively short descriptions of Magdalene's life in sin, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* provides a longer representation of this aspect of Magdalene's life. Bokenham, more like the author of the *Gilte Legende*, constructs a narrative about the dangers of '[y]outhe, abundaunce, & eek beute' (l. 5397), arguing that 'for lak of deu dylygence' (l. 5398) the combination of these attributes can bring about 'insolence' (l. 5399). The *OED* records 'insolent' as having had the sense of '[e]xtravagant, immoderate, *going beyond the bounds of propriety* (my emphasis)' circa 1500, but it could

[204] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Life of S. Pelagienne*, in *The Golden Legend or lives of the saints as Englished by William Caxton*, ed. F. S. Ellis (London: J. M. Dent, 1900), V. 234-8, p. 235.

also mean '[p]roud, disdainful, haughty, arrogant [and] overbearing'.[205] While the first definition is relevant to the later discussion in this chapter of transgression and deviance, the reader might take the implication that the young, rich, and beautiful Magdalene is guilty of pride, a representation that is developed in Lewis Wager's sixteenth-century play. In line with medieval thinking that no sin exists in isolation, Magdalene's pride (the most serious of all the seven deadly sins and the cause of Lucifer's fall) can be understood as a cause of lechery, for she is said to have dispensed of her body 'vnshamefastly / […] & in synfulnesse' (ll. 5403-4). Though the text does not state directly that sexual sin is a direct result of pride, the text comments that youth, wealth and beauty '[m]ynystrys bene vn-to insolence, / And of alle vycys þe bryngers yn' (ll. 5399-5400).

Moving beyond the accounts in the *Gilte Legende* and the *Festial*, Bokenham's Magdalene is described as becoming 'comoun' (l. 5405). As well as making explicit that her sin is sexual, the term is important since a 'common woman' was the term usually given to a prostitute. The fourteenth-century *Book of Vices and Virtues*, in its explication of 'wikkede craftes', includes the 'comune wommen, þat for a litle wynnynge 3yuen here bodies and sellen to worche wiþ synne'.[206] If Bokenham's Magdalene is interpreted as 'comoun' in this economic and professional sense (rather than just in the sense of a woman who had sex with many different men), she might be understood as using her body as a means of barter. Given that Mary Magdalene, as a wealthy heiress and property owner, is already represented as financially independent, she could be read as attaining a further degree of economic self-sufficiency from her sexual freedoms. Yet the suggestion that Magdalene might have

[205] 'Insolent, *adj.* and *n.*' > *OED* (meanings 3 and A.I. 1). See: 'Oxford English Dictionary' > http://www.oed.com/ [accessed 17 August 2013]. The sense referring to pride is recorded in 1386. While the *Middle English Dictionary* does not make explicit reference to the bounds of propriety, it records the senses 'immoderate, excessive, disreputable, wicked […]' and 'contemptuous, arrogant'. See meanings a and c: Sherman M. Kuhn (ed.) and John Reidy (associate ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: I-L* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1968), pp. 219-20, p. 219.

[206] See W. Nelson Francis (ed.), *The Book of Vices and Virtues: a fourteenth century English translation of the Somme le roi of Lorens d'Orléans*, EETS O. S. 217 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 41.

gained earnings from prostitution is problematic in terms of economics and social class. Since she already possesses sources of income and economic freedom unusual in her sex, it is seemingly incompatible that she would need to engage in sexual activity for payment.[207] This representation corresponds with an antifeminist tradition of conceptualizing women as both materialistic and sexually voracious, but also contributes to understandings of her as possessing sexual and economic power. If she is a whore, the reader might take the implication that she is a whore by choice.

2. The Unruly Woman

While thus far the chapter has focussed on the literal representations of Magdalene's sin, I have intimated from the outset that I am more concerned with the broader issues of unruliness and unnatural ambition in women. The economically independent woman in medieval and early modern thinking and socio-economic practice approached something of the status of a man. She countered patriarchal definitions of the subordinate woman.

Magdalene's identity as a woman with property is best understood by considering her through the lens of other literary heiresses. In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (ca. 1596), it is implied that the heiress, or 'lady richly left', possesses a sense of implicitly masculine, or at least not exclusively feminine, authority.[208] As Portia tells Bassanio after he has selected the correct casket and won her hand in marriage:

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[207] Something of the irreconcilable tendencies outlined above are indicated by Ruth Mazo Karras, when she notes the apparent uneasiness in medieval representations of Mary Magdalene's prostitution. In her chapter section 'Harlot Saints and Financial Exchange', Karras writes that: 'Despite the fact that Mary Magdalen became the patron saint of repentant prostitutes, she was rarely depicted as a professional, making her living from sexual acts. Her social class differentiated her from prostitutes who commonly practiced in medieval towns (muting somewhat the universality of her biography's message of repentance and salvation), yet at the same time the texts equated her with a common prostitute because of her sexual morals. She was definitely a whore if not a professional; and money did have its role to play in at least one English version of her story'. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: prostitution and sexuality in medieval England*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 120.

[208] William Shakespeare, *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (London; New York: Norton, 2008), pp. 1121-75, I.i.161.

> […] I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself.[209]

While the play represents Portia as describing her unmarried self as 'Queen o'er [her]self', a conceptualization that modern feminist critics might wish to question (she has little choice over her sexual destiny), it is relevant that Shakespeare's wordplay also describes herself as 'lord' and 'master', two unambiguously masculine terms.

The passage above, combining masculine and feminine terms for authority, encapsulates the tension implicit in the phenomenon of the financially independent single woman. As in John Fletcher's *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* (1624), a play which stages the subduing of the wealthy and promiscuous Margarita, the woman with property is represented in terms which differentiate her from her sex (without her ever becoming a male mimic). When Margarita tells her suitor, Leon, that he must not be her 'master Sir' or 'talk ith house as though [he] wore the breeches', the implication seems to be that her socio-economic status grants her almost masculine power.[210] Indeed, although Leon promises to 'doe any thing to serve [his] *Ladiship*' (a promise which is spectacularly undermined when he marries Margarita and becomes 'Lord' of her house and 'all that's in't'), the unbetrothed Margarita imagines her authority in male terms.[211] She seems to visualize herself as 'master Sir' or the person wearing the trousers.

These two texts, though products of the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rather than the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, help elucidate understandings of the significance of Magdalene's identity as a single woman with property. Though the three hagiographers' representations of Magdalene as the woman who committed fleshly (implicitly sexual) sin should not be played down, what is nearly as important is that

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[209] Shakespeare, *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice*, III.ii.167-69.
[210] John Fletcher, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, ed. George Walton Williams, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 501-77, II.iii.37 and II.iii.38.
[211] Fletcher, *Rule a Wife*, II.iii.36 (my emphasis), III.v.76 and III.v.77.

depictions of Magdalene as the 'female wild' derive in part from her relatively unusual position as an heiress – and a woman who can be interpreted as negotiating a space outside male control.[212] This section will argue that conceptualizations of Magdalene's implicit promiscuity, and in Bokenham's narrative prostitution, can be interpreted metonymically, for her sexual sin is represented as part of a greater (and more troubling) offence: she is presented as violating strict social codes and calling into question dominant ideological constructions of the feminine – subordinated – woman. Magdalene's problematic gender role is intrinsically linked with her identity as counter-heroine (an identity that might also be applied to some other female saints).

There are few terms that would better sum up the representations of Mary Magdalene in the opening lines of Mirk's *Festial* than unruly. In this text Magdalene is presented implicitly as living outside the boundaries of masculine control. The sermon opens with the description of the death of the patriarch and the discussion of how Magdalene's father gave her the familial castle at 'hys dying'. By beginning the homily in this way, the author signposts to the reader or audience that Mary Magdalene is not only a property owner (a detail that should not be ignored since this figure, as the recipient of the castle with its lordship, would have the responsibility of managing an estate and the people working

[212] Jansen also acknowledges that Magdalene is represented as outside male control. In a section entitled 'Wealth, Freedom, and Beauty', Jansen provides literary-historical analysis of the different reasons for Magdalene's fall into sin. She acknowledges the significance of Magdalene's role as heiress, as well as the emphasis placed on wealth, sexual sin, and individual will. See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 149-55. Relevant to a consideration of female unruliness, Arthurs, in 'Revolting Women', pp. 144-51, has argued that the character of Patsy Stone in *Absolutely Fabulous* can be understood as unruly since she is 'economically independent and live[s] outside and beyond the control of men' (p. 144). This unruliness is compounded by the way in which Patsy deviates from 'the rules of acceptable behaviour' (p. 149) and is 'permanently beyond control' (p. 144), Arthurs making reference to her 'transgression of bodily decorum' (p. 148), lack of maternal nature, and the way that she 'talks and behaves like a man when it comes to her body and its appetites' (p. 150).

on it), but a woman living as a result of her father's death outside the confines of male rule.[213] While Magdalene is described as having a brother, Lazarus, the emphasis on the division of property and land suggests her unusual, even abnormal, sense of autonomy. Since Lazarus possesses a 'grete lordeschep in Ierusalem' (p. 184), it might be assumed, though the text does not make this absolutely explicit, that Magdalene by holding a separate estate avoids being placed under male surveillance.[214]

A similar conceptualization can be found in Bokenham's version of events, for the text begins with the description of how Magdalene inherited 'a castel callyd Magdalum' (l. 5384) after the siblings divided 'þe possessyoun[s] / Of here genyturs, Syre & Euchary' (ll. 5382-3). Given that Lazarus is described in this text as a soldier, it is possible (though it is never said in the narrative) that he would need to go away on military campaigns, furthering this idea of Magdalene's freedom from male control.

As well as implicitly living outside the control of both father and brother – and not living within the walls of a convent – Magdalene is unmarried (yet, as Bokenham makes clear, not a virgin). While the *Festial* presents the tradition of Magdalene's estrangement from John the Evangelist, a tradition which is neither verified nor denied in the *Gilte*

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[213] The *Festial* does not discuss the responsibilities that come with being an heiress, but the *Gilte Legende* does when it makes clear that Magdalene failed to perform her duties. Indeed, the narrator states that 'whanne the Maudeleyn was yeuen al to [the] delytes of the body and her brother Lazar enten[d]ed most to the knyghthode, Martha that was wyse gouerned [right nobly] the parti of her brother and of her suster and minystred to knightes and to seruauntes and to pore men her necessitees' (p. 469). Similarly in the *Early South English Legendary*, it is said that 'Martha nam hire brothur lond and hire sustres also, / And dude heom teolien wel inough, ase wyse man scholde do; / Tharewith heo fedde alle heore men and clothede heom also' (ll. 59-61). Note that there is already in this detail an image of containment since Magdalene is to some extent placed under her sister's control.

[214] Pseudo-Rabanus' twelfth-century *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Martha* provides, in contrast, a different representation which restores familial oversight over single women since although the three siblings are described as having 'possessed by hereditary right a great patrimony and also many lands and slaves', it is said that they lived 'together in common' (p. 29). Since she is the oldest, Martha is given the role of managing all the estates: a 'trust which she did not insolently abuse [that is to say, exercise any unnatural, unwomanly assumption of authority], but bearing in her woman's breast a manly spirit, performed it liberally' (p. 29). Incidentally, note here that Martha's 'manly' spirit is conceptualized in terms of her womanly benevolence (rather than her problematic transgression of gender boundaries which Pseudo-Rabanus deals with in what seem nervously ambiguous terms) since 'she was sweet and loving; to the poor, gentle and friendly; to all, in short, merciful and liberal' (pp. 29-30).

Legende, the hagiographers do not elaborate on the significance of her social position as a free woman.

In the later Wager play, Cupiditi states that '[t]he bedde wherin lieth any maried wife/ Is neuer without chidying, braulyng, and strife' (ll. 656-7). Carnal Concupiscence backs up Cupiditi's derogatory opinions on matrimony with the statement that Magdalene should not be 'in subiection' (l. 662) but rather 'at [her] owne election' (l. 663) since nothing 'in this world excelleth libertie' (l. 664) and Pride adds the pithy comment that: 'Of all bondage truely this is the ground/ A gentlewoman to one husband to be bound' (l. 660-1). Though the fact that these ideas of female freedom from marital control are articulated by personifications of vice might suggest that they should not be interpreted at the service of women, the points that they are making are pertinent to an understanding of Magdalene's troubling power. While the use of vice characters and a reassuringly negative dramatic discourse emphasizes that female independence remains an evil, the text nevertheless brings into the open some of the tensions implicit in medieval hagiographical representations of the sinful Magdalene. She is not burdened by a marital role that Emma Goldman depicts in terms of 'life-long dependency', 'parasitism' and 'complete uselessness', but is conceptualized as an autonomous woman.[215]

This autonomy is developed through the suggestion of sexual freedoms. In *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, the narrator describes how:

> For al hir [Mary Magdalene's] youthe in dislauynesse ['dissoluteness']
> Of hir body so vnshamefastly
> She dispendyd, & in synfulnesse
> So comoun she was […]
> (ll. 5402-5)

While it is significant that this figure's sexuality is imaged in terms of 'synfulnesse' (as Angela Carter notes, 'a "bad girl" always contains the meaning of a sexually active girl'), the

[215] Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and Love', in *Anarchism and other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969), 227-39, p. 228.

allusion to '*hir* body' (my emphasis) is also important.[216] From this description, the reader is made aware that Magdalene has 'possessive individualism', for her body is her own – to give and to receive pleasure from as she pleases. Magdalene, to borrow Goldman's words, is 'free […] to learn the mystery of sex without the sanction of the State and Church'.[217]

Whereas Thomas Robinson's later *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1621) contains the threat posed by the heroine's sexual agency by accentuating her sexiness (the narrator's remark that '[s]ometimes in silken beds shee *sweltred* lies', l. 392 might be suggestively post-coital, but it also posits her as the object of a voyeuristic male gaze), Bokenham's Magdalene is not constructed as a figure to be desired. Robinson refers to how the 'Sun peep'd' at the heroine and her lover (l. 375) and blushed at the 'wickednesse of *Vestaes sonnes* to viewe' (l. 378), a description which follows the detailed allusions to Magdalene's body, including to her 'soft necke, and shoulders iu'ry white' (l. 200) and her '*debared* brests' (l. 223). While Robinson's Magdalene, a woman who is also physically sensual and guilty of 'polluted acts' (l. 367), embodies the same 'to-be-looked-at-ness' that Laura Mulvey (1975) has discussed in relation to women of narrative cinema, the Magdalene of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is not objectified in the way of the heroine from Robinson's poem.[218] Her troubling sexuality is not co-opted at the service of male readers. As a woman who is 'comoun' (l. 5405) by choice and whose sexuality is not confined to one man as in conventional marital bonds, she may be understood as possessing (potentially threatening) sexual agency.

The three texts appear to draw on the tradition of presenting Mary Magdalene as a sinner and, according to Bokenham's implication, a whore, to provide a narrative about the

[216] Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006), p. 54.
[217] Goldman, 'Marriage and Love', p. 231.
[218] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14-26, p. 19.

dangers of the wayward (that is to say, socially- and sexually- deviant) woman. As Jansen has argued:

> Whichever legend one chose to believe, the unshakeable fact still remained that the Magdalen was outside the realm of male supervision, a grave danger to a young woman's moral development.[219]

Citing the line from the Latin *Thesaurus Novus* (published in 1488) that said that '[s]he was a free woman [and] feared no one' and the subsequent moral that 'there is no advantage to women being left in liberty, following their own will', Jansen notes that in

> the view of medieval moralists, female nature more naturally inclined towards sin. Without male wisdom to guide her, they argued, a woman was seduced into wickedness.[220]

The idea that the particular sinfulness of Magdalene is partly related to her lack of governance is made powerfully explicit in Alban Butler's eighteenth-century account of 'St Mary Magdalene' (an account found in his compendium of Catholic saints' lives). The narrator begins with a lengthy exposition of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15. 11-32): a figure who 'blinded by his passions, thought himself prudent and strong enough to be his own governor and master, and flattered himself that his love of liberty and pleasure was not very criminal or unjust'.[221] That Butler starts his account of Mary Magdalene's life in sin with the statement that the 'source of all [the prodigal son's] misfortunes is a love of independence and of his own will' corresponds with the medieval hagiographers' more implicit conceptualizations of an autonomous female protagonist.[222] Magdalene's identity as counter-heroine is firmly connected to her circumvention of masculine authority and control.

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[219] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 151. This emphasis on lack of supervision is brought out in Sheila Delany's 1993 translation. Delany translates the reference to 'lak of deu dylygence' being a cause of vice (l. 5398) as 'lack of proper supervision'. Bokenham, 'Mary Magdalen's Life', in *A Legend of Holy Women*, pp. 101-23, p. 108.
[220] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 151.
[221] Rev. Alban Butler, 'St Mary Magdalen', in *The Lives of Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, ed. Rev. Bernard Kelly (London: Burns and Oats, 1956) [May 1-July 25], II. 818-30, p. 818.
[222] Butler, 'St Mary Magdalen', p. 818.

3. Ambition and the Threat to Authority

It has been argued above that Magdalene is unruly and the unruly woman is the product of male anxieties about deviant, and indeed ambitious, gender behaviour. Owing to cumulative representations of her sexual, social, and economic autonomy, Magdalene, a propertied single woman, can be understood as the recipient of a lifestyle usually associated with her social superiors: the male ruling elite.[223] S. H. Rigby points out that '[i]n terms of her property rights, a woman who […] inherited was, so long as she remained single "on a par with men"' but Magdalene's identity as heiress (an identity that Rigby implies has the potential for the blurring of traditional gender hierarchies) represents only one way in which she might be understood as transgressive.[224] The sinful Magdalene presents a problematic figure because she is outside male control; possesses socio-economic power; and deviates from behaviour considered respectable for her sex. Her implied sexual sin, though the most obvious example of deviance, is less important than her overall transgression beyond the bounds of female subordination.[225] In sociological terms, she deviates from her ascribed role as a subservient subject in a patriarchal society.[226] She can be understood as a subversive female figure.

This emphasis on deviance is made apparent in the descriptions of how the *Festial*'s Magdalene '3af hyr al to synne […] insomyche þat scho loste þe name of Magdaleyne and was kallyd "þe synful womman"' (p. 184). Since naming is integral to identity, Magdalene's 'un-naming' seems to signal a break with her earlier subject status. The representations in the

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[223] While I do not mean to suggest that there is something inherently *masculine* about being sexually promiscuous (medieval antifeminist tradition concentrated on women's inherent lustiness), the point is that the woman whose sexuality is not governed by her husband has possessive individualism and in that respect has the autonomy more often experienced by men.

[224] S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: class, status, and gender* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 262.

[225] Relevant to a consideration of this transgression beyond the bounds of female subordination, Malvern comments on *Das Erlauer Österspiel III*, a fifteenth-century German drama, in which 'Peter says to the Magdalen after she has run to tell him of her having seen the risen Christ, ''That rumor (sic) I will not believe. Hurry home and mind your spinning. It is a sin and shame that females run all over the countryside'''. See Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, p. 38.

[226] For discussion of ascribed and achieved roles and statuses, see Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt, *Sociology*, 4th edn (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976), pp. 102-5.

three texts of Magdalene as nameless find parallels in Wilkie Collins' *No Name* (1862), where the protagonist Magdalen Vanstone and her sister Norah become 'Nobody's Children' after the death of their parents.[227] Revealed as having been born to unmarried parents, the sisters are disinherited and forced to leave the familial home, a representation that Virginia Blain (1986) argues serves as 'an evocative and subversive metaphor for the position of all women as non-persons in a patriarchal and patrilineal society'.[228] Magdalene's loss of name is open to several readings. While Ruth Mazo Karras sees her loss of name as connoting that 'the sexually sinful woman thus becomes generic, no longer an individual but subsumed in the evil of her sex', focussing on the vulnerability of the sexual (rather than illegitimate) woman to loss of identity, it is possible to draw yet another, different conclusion.[229] Although the fact that Magdalene is named 'þe synful *womman*' (*Festial*, p. 184, my emphasis) corroborates Karras' argument, Magdalene's sin, at least as it is represented in the *Festial*,

[227] Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 138.
[228] Virginia Blain, 'Introduction', in Collins, *No Name*, pp. vii-xxi, p. xix.
[229] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 122.

need not necessarily be regarded as specifically or exclusively feminine.[230] As a woman who is unrespectable and outside the bounds of male control, her sin can be understood in terms of her deviation from appropriate female behaviour. Pursuing an 'against the grain' interpretation, Magdalene's loss of name (even if it is linked to traditions of sexual sin) might suggest that she has moved beyond a subordinate identity subscribed at birth.

Magdalene's sin or unruliness can be read in terms of her ambition and confrontation of traditional hierarchies. This figure, whom Bokenham accuses of 'insolence' (l. 5399), might be understood as challenging an authority 'which would subjugate her and render her docile'.[231] As a woman in possession of liberties interpreted cumulatively as social, sexual and economic, she deviates from her identity as a subordinate figure in a patriarchal social order. This is particularly significant given Rosemary Horrox's 1994 observation that medieval society:

> to a degree which modern readers sometimes find disconcerting, was based on hierarchy. Human society, mirroring the whole created universe, was arranged in order of importance.[232]

In a society where a person is identified by his or her social position, Magdalene's unruliness and unusual female freedoms present not just a thumbing of the nose at conventions of sex and gender, but an act of dissent against hierarchy itself. In what Maurice Keen describes as 'what we nowadays call a deference society', deviation from normative gender roles challenges social order.[233]

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[230] Sarah Salih, in a discussion of the conversion scenes in the *Book of Margery Kempe* and the Digby plays pertaining to Paul and Magdalene, also reads Magdalene's sin as feminine. Having argued that the 'pre-conversion sins of both [Magdalene and Margery] – sexual transgression, materialism, and vanity – are those identified as particularly feminine', she suggests that in 'a muted recollection of the '''virility'' ascribed to early Christian women, to become more perfect, Mary and Margery have to become, if not masculine, at least differently feminine'. Sarah Salih, 'Staging conversion: the Digby saint plays and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Gender and Holiness,* ed. Riches and Salih, pp. 121-34 (127 and p. 131).

[231] Faith, *Unruly Women*, p. 1.

[232] Rosemary Horrox, 'Service', in *Fifteenth-century Attitudes: Perceptions of society in late Medieval England*, ed. Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 61-78, p. 61.

[233] Keen writes that: 'Deference implies an ordered graduation of society, its hierarchic arrangement by scales which regulate the respect and the kind of services which one man or woman may expect of another, or may expect to pay another'. Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, The Penguin social history of Britain (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 1.

This ambitious behaviour, while only implicit in the texts, is presented explicitly in the later Wager play. Here, the sinful Magdalene is told by Infidelitie that she will be made 'a Goddesse anone' (l. 523) and that '[a]ll other gods beside [her] selfe [she] must despise/ And set at nought their Scripture in any wise' (ll. 520-1). Wager's Magdalene is shown to be narcissistic and it might be understood that pride in women poses a threat to authority – here shown to be divine authority as opposed to the ruling elite on earth. The figure of Cupiditi observes elsewhere that 'these women that be vicious [full of vices]/ Are alwais high mynded and ambicious' (ll. 369-70), and this line might provide a programme for the different ideas being discussed in the chapter. Though the hagiographers do not conceptualize Magdalene as setting herself up as a rival deity, it could be argued that Wager does not go that much further than his predecessors (even if initially this seems to be the case). There might be a leap between challenging the order of man and the order of God, but the second act is only the logical extension of the first. If, as Horrox suggests, power relations on earth are modelled on power relations in the 'whole created universe', challenging the authority of the divinely-appointed leaders on earth (which Magdalene does by dint of being an autonomous agent) can be read as an act of dissent against God himself.[234] A woman who is 'proude, loftie, and of hye mynde' (l. 526), as Wager's Magdalene is encouraged to be, is not under the governance of any Lord.

Chapter one notes that Magdalene is both like and unlike other female saints, and some other women from hagiography are conceptualized as unruly and ambitious. Though Magdalene's sin (in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* especially) is most obviously predicated on her troubling sexuality, it is clear that not all disobedient women saints display an – actively – sexualized disobedience. The female virgin martyrs, saints who are militantly virginal out of choice and whose unruliness is in part revealed in their refusal to marry or to submit to the sexual act, display an 'ardent […] desire to rise to high position, or to attain

[234] Horrox, 'Service', in *Fifteenth-century Attitudes*, p. 1.

rank, influence, distinction or other preferment'.[235] While the promise of self-aggrandizement for the martyr saints involves delayed gratification (or a kind of upward social mobility in the afterlife), it is relevant that these women threaten their male tormentors on earth.[236] The *Gilte Legende*'s Cecilia tells her persecutor Almachien that:

> youre might is in youre bely that is full of wynde, for yef it were pricked a litell with a nedill or a pynne, alle youre might wolde sone fade.[237]

This is not the only point in their discourse in which Cecilia is presented as metaphorically emasculating her antagonist (or 'pricking' him with her sharp tongue, the organ described by Sheila Delany as a substitute penis).[238] When the protagonist tells Almachien '"I trow you have loste thi sight"', the modern reader is reminded of psychoanalytic traditions associating male fears about becoming blind with castration anxiety.[239] In power terms, Cecilia's unruliness threatens to render her male antagonist, Almachien, impotent.

Though Cecila's problematic gender behaviour is represented differently to Magdalene's, both women can be understood as counter-heroines: women whose insubordination renders them counter to patriarchal definitions of the normative, feminine female.

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[235] 'ambition', *n* (meaning 1) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013].
[236] For a discussion incorporating treatment of the ways in which the virgin martyrs challenge male authority figures, see Winstead's chapter 'Unruly Virgins and the Laity, 1250-1400'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, pp. 64-111.
[237] Richard Hamer (ed.), with the assistance of Vida Russell, *St Cecilia I*, in *Gilte Legende*, EETS O. S. 328 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), II. 652-60, p. 659.
[238] See Delany's discussion of Katherine preaching where she argues that the saint 'assumes the ''masculine'' or leadership position by exercising an organ that is an upwardly displaced version of the male sex organ'. Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 97.
[239] *St Cecilia*, p. 659. I am referring here to Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny' where Freud links this anxiety to the displacement found in the narrative of Oedipus' self-blinding. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. 17, pp. 217-52, p. 231.

Part Two: Discipline and Punish

1. Representations of the Penitent

I argued in the first chapter that a defining feature of medieval Magdalene hagiography involves the containment of the counter-heroine. This pattern can be seen in the narrative episode depicting Magdalene's repentance. If conceptualizations of Magdalene's life in sin may be read vis-à-vis discourses about unruliness and ambition, it is significant that Magdalene is presented as performing penance for her misdeeds (misdeeds that can be interpreted on a number of different levels). This part argues that the narratives that the hagiographers construct about the sinner-turned-penitent can be read in terms of discourses about the disciplining and punishing of troubling gender behaviour. Having been represented as a counter-heroine in the field of sexual politics, it is possible to interpret the account of her repentance as an instance of containment in the texts. Given that Magdalene is punished by the authors, rather than by elements in the fiction, her penance can be read as a textual strategy of restraint.

The three texts represent Magdalene as expressing contrition for her sins, though the representations of her confession differ across the texts. In *Festial*, the narrator moves from stating that Magdalene '3af hyr al to synne' (p. 184), a result of having been jilted by John the Evangelist, to noting that:

> þan for it was often seyne þat Cryste of þe gresteyste synnerres he made þe moste holy aftyr, whefore, whan he seygh tyme, he 3af þis womman grace to knowyn hyr self and repentaunce of hur mysdedus (pp. 184-5).

Drawing attention to Magdalene's 'schame' over her actions, the narrator describes how she prostrated herself before Christ and 'wyth alle þe love þat was in hyr herte scheo cussyd hys fette' (p. 185). She is presented as being so overcome with 'gylte of synne' that she pledges to 'neure trespace more' and is so remorseful that she does not utter any words 'þat man myght here' (p. 185). The representation of this silent and submissive figure stands in stark

contrast with the conceptualization of an individual so at odds with society that she earned the title 'þe synful womman' (p. 184).[240] As Sinfield notes when describing Desdemona's changing character in *Othello*, '[i]t is almost as if the Wife of Bath were reincarnated as Griselda'.[241]

While the *Festial* makes the point that 'softely in hyr herte [Magdalene] cried to Criste of mercy' (p. 185), the *Gilte Legende* does not specify the mode of Mary Magdalene's confession. In this text, the narrator describes how Magdalene was 'enspired withe grace' and 'came to the fete of oure Lorde and there she wosshe hem withe her teeres and wyped hem with her here and anoynted hem withe precious oynementes' (p. 470). The somewhat vague reference to the specific nature of Magdalene's confession (does she confess her sins aloud or is just contrite in her heart?) is important because of contemporaneous questions about whether or not confession to a priest is necessary.[242] Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (ca. 1410) says that although the 'gospel telleþ not þat she [Luke's sinner/ Magdalene] spake any Worde by mouþe' she was permitted to make 'confession in herte' since 'oure lorde Jesus […] was þer in bodily presence verrey god & man'.[243] The text criticizes the 'fals opinyon of lollardes þat shrift of mouþe is not nedeful' and argues that as 'we haue not here his bodily presence as Maudleyn hade' it is necessary to confess 'oure sinne to þe prestes þat he haþ specialy ordeynet in his stede as his

[240] Compare Gail Ashton's reading of Mirk's Magdalene: 'Magdalene, woman-as-other, humbly kneels in silent, passive contrition before Christ, symbol of masculine law and son of a masculine-created God'. Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 16.
[241] Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 53.
[242] For discussion of medieval treatments of and attitudes towards Mary Magdalene's confession, see Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 212-224. Coletti has discussed the significance of the Digby play's 'emphasis on Mary Magdalene's inner piety of heart', arguing that this representation 'corresponds to the well-documented spiritual preferences of the prosperous classes in late medieval England'. Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth it Yow Lere"', p. 17.
[243] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004), pp. 90, 91.

vikeres'.[244] This emphasis on confession to priests is relevant in light of Judy Ann Ford's 2006 insight that the 'trend in the orthodox theology of confession from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries was to confer more power on the confessor' and Jansen's observation that after 1215 the practice became the 'centrepiece of sacramental piety' but also 'a means of social control'.[245]

If the *Gilte Legende* evades the issue of outward confession and the *Festial* suggests that Magdalene was contrite in her heart, the representation of confession in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is more complex. Although Bokenham states that 'wyth hir mouth outwardly/ To hym no wurde she dede expresse' (ll. 5437-8), he then goes on to describe what she said in her heart. While this might seem similar to the representation in the *Festial*, the fact that Bokenham says '[…] As þow she had vsyd þis language: "O moste meke lord […]"' (ll. 5443-4) and dedicates fourteen lines to representing in direct speech her confession and plea for reform means that it is easy to forget that Magdalene is not articulating her thoughts aloud. It is particularly significant that Magdalene says: 'Y am a synnere, & of euery cryme/ Wyth spottys defoulyd ful horrybylly' (ll. 5452-3). Michel Foucault has argued that confession is a:

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[244] Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life*, pp. 90, 91. The Wycliffite sermon 'On Confession', which F. D. Matthew says has a style that is 'distinctly Wyclif's' (p. 325), refers to the figure of Magdalene to argue against the necessity of private confession to the priest. The narrator states: 'Whenne crist for3aue marie magde|leyne hir synnes, he vsed not siche rownynge; and whenne he for3aue petir hise synnes, & poule his, & oþer men heren þat he clensid, he vsid not sich rownyng in ere, ne siche asoylyng as prestis vsen nowe; and þus whenne crist clensed þe a|woutrer, þat þe Iewes alegeden shulde be stoned, crist vsed not þis confession to hir, but bad hir go and wilne to synne. no more. and siþ þat crist my3t not faile in ordynaunce to hise chirche, & he left þis confessioun, it semyth þat it is not nedeful; for if it were, þenne crist faylid in leuynge it; and also petre & alle oþer apostles […]'. John Wyclif, 'On Confession', in *The English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted*, ed. F. D. Matthew, EETS O.S. 74 (London: Trübner, 1880), pp. 325-45, p. 328.

[245] Annual confession to priests was made compulsory in 1215. Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 35 and Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 186. Jansen's comments on social control are derived from a body of scholarship by French critics including but not limited to Nicole Bériou and Jacques Berlioz. For fuller discussion of the role of confession and its representation in some *Festial* sermons, see Ford's chapter 'Clerical Power and Lay Agency' (pp. 32-69). In the course of this chapter, and drawing on the work of Brian Patrick McGuire, Ford discusses Jean Gerson's (1363-1429) theory of confession, which 'envisioned a confessional practice that would allow the confessor to dominate the penitent thoroughly' and encouraged the confessor to be more draconian in his actions towards the penitent (p. 37). Although Ford discusses an episode from the *Festial* in which an 'ordinary woman [discusses] her spiritual state with Christ without an intermediary' (p. 40), suggesting that the episode 'dramatizes what the Lollards advocated', she argues that 'Mirk's sermons unquestionably set confession in an orthodox framework: they advocate frequent confession of all sins to a priest, and make it unequivocally clear that sinners who die unconfessed will be damned'(p. 46).

> ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile. [246]

In this respect, the Magdalene of the Bokenham text might be felt to provide a model for the self-loathing penitent outside the text. Although Magdalene is granted agency in the sense that she asks Christ to '[r]eforme [her] now' (l. 5455) and is favourably conceptualized as delivering her inward plea with 'corage' (l. 5442), her negative self-perception is shown to mirror Simon the Leper's description of her as 'a synere […], & of bad fame' (l. 5463). Similarly to Pseudo-Cavalca's fourteenth-century Magdalene, a figure who the narrator imagines describing herself as a 'wretched and pitiful hound' and 'worse than the unclean swine' (p. 26), Bokenham's protagonist is represented as highly critical of her past misdemeanours.

I referred above to the penitential Magdalene as self-loathing and it is worth elaborating on the significance of this description. Sharing parallels with W. E. B. Du Bois' 1903 account of 'double-consciousness', Dallas G. Denery suggests that in confession 'not only does the confessor see the penitent, the penitent is taught to see himself through the confessor's gaze'.[247] Denery's observation makes clear that the success of confession relies on the penitent coming to view him- or herself as wicked, thereby internalizing the opinion of the confessor. Bokenham's Magdalene, then, is the perfect example of the penitent who does not need to be admonished because she admonishes herself.[248] What I mean is that she comes

[246]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume one: an introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 59.

[247] Dallas G. Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 7. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes: 'It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *The Souls of Black Folk: authoritative text, contexts, criticism*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1999), pp. 1-166, p. 11.

[248] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* (1484) suggests that Magdalene might serve as a model for the penitent. As the narrator states: 'And thus at thexample of her we ought to do as she dyd/ For we ought to wepe for our synnes and mysdedes. and haue pyte and be shamefull of that that we haue done and humbly goo to Confession/ and there to the preeste we ought to telle our synnes as we haue done them without hydyng or coueryng nothyng thereof […]'. See Caxton (trans.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 132.

to see herself as others see her (or wish for her to see herself) and desires to be reformed or moulded like the subject-object of Behaviourist psychology.[249] When she says, inwardly, 'Y am a synnere, & of euery cryme' (l. 5451), she engages in a sort of self-flagellation, not dissimilarly to Pseudo-Cavalca's Magdalene. Magdalene's association with self-discipline is important, since Jansen, who discusses the emphasis on violent contrition in Pseudo-Cavalca's text, notes that Italian *disciplinati* communities of flagellants were often dedicated to the saint.[250] Though Bokenham's Magdalene does not use a stone to '[strike] herself, on her breast and there where she thought it would not kill her' (p. 27) – note the strong emphasis on the violation of the female body – she uses words as weapons to discipline and inflict injury upon herself. Just as Pseudo-Cavalca's Magdalene is imagined as '[striking] her eyes and her face with her fists' (p. 27), Bokenham's protagonist metaphorically 'beat[s] herself' for her transgressions when she engages in a non-physical mortification of the self (p. 27).

2. The Gender Politics of Penance

The discussion above has drawn on debates about interior confession (a debate of great importance at the moment of the texts' cultural production) and the issue of interiority is significant in other ways. In *The Fear of Freedom*, Erich Fromm, after discussing the emphasis in Lutheran and Calvinist thought on self-abasement and absolute surrender to God, makes the point that:

> 'conscience' is a slave driver, put into man by himself. It drives him to act according to wishes and aims which he *believes* to be his own, while they are actually the internalization of external social demands.[251]

[249] Behaviourism can be defined as: 'The theoretical view, associated with J. B Watson and B. F. Skinner, that sees directly observable behaviour as the proper focus of study, and that sees the developing child as a passive respondent to conditioning, reinforcement, and punishment […].' See 'Glossary', in *An Introduction to Developmental Psychology*, ed. Alan Slater and Gavin Bremner, 2nd edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 717-46, p. 719.
[250] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 225-8.
[251] Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 84.

Fromm's argument, which shares a number of parallels with materialist thinking on the way in which ideology operates, is important to an understanding of the texts.[252] Although the Magdalene of hagiography chooses to attend the house of Simon the Leper to repent for her sins (nobody forces her to perform penance), the texts suggest that this decision was willed by God or God the Son (Christ). Bokenham writes that Magdalene lived a wretched life until:

> […] at þe laste, thorgh þe mercyfulnesse
> Compunt ['conscience-stricken'] she was of our lord ihesu,
> Wych þat lyuyd & tawt uertu,
> Thorgh whos doctryne she was in entent
> Of hir fore-lyf to makyn a-mendement.
> (ll. 5411-15).

While the *Festial* and *Gilte Legende* do not explicitly refer to conscience, the former states that when Christ saw 'tyme, he 3af þis womman grace to knowyn hyr self' (p. 185) and the latter relates that 'whanne oure Lorde preched here in erthe she was enspired withe grace and went to the hous of Simond the lepre' (pp. 469-70). In all three texts Magdalene's decision to repent is represented as both of her choosing and yet not her choice.

Keeping in mind Coletti's argument that the Digby play shares links with conduct literature and applying Fromm's reading of conscience as a model for the internalization of social ideas, it is possible to read the conversion narrative as signifying the 'straightening out' of an unruly, and therefore threatening, female figure.[253] In Mirk's *Festial*, this figure is described as becoming so ashamed of her previous life that she speaks 'no worde' and is too embarrassed to stand 'before Cryste'. It would seem that Magdalene here is not merely silent but silenced. Where the sinful figure might be understood to 'speak' through her body (present-day, pro-sex feminism conceptualizes sexuality as a kind of voice), she becomes

[252] Elsewhere in his study, Fromm's discussion of 'willing' correlates with conceptualizations of the processes of ideology and interpellation: 'Most people are convinced that as long as they are not overtly forced to do something by an outside power, their decisions are theirs, and that if they want something, it is they who want it. But this is one of the great illusions we have about ourselves. A great number of decisions are not really our own but are suggested to us from the outside'. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 172.
[253] As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Coletti has discussed the Digby play in relation to Riddy's work on conduct texts for women.

literally and metaphorically mute, her promise that she 'wolde neure trespace more' (p. 185) signifying that she has internalized the discourses that idealize the chaste and reticent woman. She becomes more similar to her Marian namesake: that (good) woman extolled in contemporary conduct literature.[254]

The narrative episode of Mary Magdalene's repentance might suggest the need for correcting deviance in women. Though not made explicit in these texts, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, drawing on the work of Benedicta Ward, suggests that the penitent Magdalene metaphorically returns to a virginal state since 'the gift of tears' restores 'fallen women […] to honorary virginity'.[255] That she is 'clensed' (*Festial*, p. 185) of her sins is important, but Magdalene, as she is represented by Mirk, is presented implicitly as also giving up her social and economic liberties. Indeed, while the *Festial*'s heroine neither enters into marriage nor is incarcerated in a nunnery or institution for wayward women (the repentant Magdalene of Robinson's poem describes being shut in 'narrowe roome', l. 1327), she nevertheless surrenders her status as the woman outside the boundaries of masculine control. The narrator describes how Magdalene 'toke suche a tendur love to Cryste þat eure aftur sche was gladde and fayne to leven alle hur ladyschep and sewon hym' (p. 185).[256] Given that adulterous women could be deprived of their property according to both canon and common law, Magdalene's departure from her estate corresponds with medieval punishments levied towards women accused of sexual sin.[257] It represents a moment of containment in the episode.

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[254] See the section from *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* entitled: 'How euery good woman ought to be meke and humble at thexamplary of the blessyd vyrgyne Mary'. *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, pp. 145-6.
[255] Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives,* p. 140.
[256] A similar but weaker representation can be found in Bokenham's legendary since the narrator moves on from the repentance episode with the statement: 'Alle þingys left, she dede hym sewe / Wher-so-euere he went ful deuouthly. / And for syche ryche was habundanthly, / She mynystyrd hym & hys in þere nede' (ll. 5503-5). In the next part of the poem, which conflates Magdalene with Mary of Bethany, Magdalene is explicitly described as living with Martha and Lazarus in Bethany.
[257] Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 263.

That the *Festial*'s Magdalene is represented as renouncing her property is significant to an understanding of the fabric of the narrative. While there are some important differences in nuance (not least that Magdalene leaves, rather than bequeaths upon Christ, her property), it is interesting that Magdalene acts similarly to some powerful romance heroines such as Sir Thomas Malory's Dame Lyonesse (1469-70). Just as the powerful and independent landowner Lyonesse, out of love for Gareth, figuratively signs away Castell Parelus, Mirk's Magdalene, out of love for Christ, rids herself of her estate.[258] In doing so, she not only loses this 'lordship of her own', but surrenders a potentially lucrative source of income.[259] It is relevant that the text here refers to Magdalene's property and lands as 'alle hur ladyschep' (p. 185). While the *OED* confirms that 'ladyship' has meant '[a] district governed by a lady', it is noticeable that the term is not recorded as having this meaning until 1709.[260] Clearly Magdalene renounces her considerable landed possessions, but the expression also conveys the notion of her losing social status, and the respect and authority resulting from that. From the early thirteenth century onwards, 'ladyschep' was typically employed to mean: 'The state or condition of being a lady; the rank, status, authority of a lady'.[261] Read in this light, Magdalene's surrender of property can be read in terms of her broader renunciation of social privileges. While Karras has argued that 'in many of the texts about [Magdalene's] early life she forfeits her claim to [a noble family] background because of her immorality', the *Festial* represents Magdalene not as forfeiting her rank and property, as a punishment for her sins, but, of her own volition, choosing to give up the privileges of her class (privileges which

[258] In the closing sentences of 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkeney', the narrator makes a number of references to male acquisition through marriage. It is said that: 'thus Sir Gareth of Orkeney was a noble knight, that wedded Dame Lyonesse of the Castell Parelus. […] And Sir Aggravayne wedded Dame Lawrell, a fayre lady with grete and mighty londys, wyth grete riches i-gyffyn wyth them, that ryally thay myght lyve tyll theire lyvis ende'. Malory, 'The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkeney', in *Le Morte Darthur,* pp. 177-227, p. 227.
[259] Indeed, in the Wager play, Magdalene is told by Infidelitie that: 'you haue in your possession / The whole castel of Magdalene, with the purtenance, / Which you may rule at your discretion, / And obtaine therby riches in abundance' (ll. 183-6).
[260] 'Ladyship, *n*' (meaning 4) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013]. The *Middle English Dictionary* also records the meaning of the 'status or condition of a highborn lady' (meaning b) , as well as the senses 'dignity or honor of a queen, exalted rank' (a) and 'dominance; control; rule' (e). See Kuhn (ed.) and Reidy (associate ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: I-L* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1968), pp. 624-5.
[261] 'Ladyship, *n*' (meaning 1) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013].

allow her to transcend the traditional limitations placed on her sex) when she repents for those sins.[262] The disciplining of gender seems to be concomitant with Magdalene's relinquishment of class privileges. Repentance, turning away from a life of sin, seems to be paralleled in a turning away from a degree of power unusual in a woman.

Magdalene's repentance in the *Festial* seems predicated on her rejection of landowning / aristocratic, hegemonically masculine freedoms. Though the sinful Magdalene does not disturb gender boundaries in the same way as some of her cross-dressing sister saints, her relatively unusual authority as an heiress, coupled with her inclination towards unruliness, means that she has an ambiguous gender role, potentially disturbing gender expectations. Although the sinful Magdalene, a figure described by Bokenham as surpassing 'alle wummen [in] excellent bewte' (l. 5392), is no Joan of Arc, there is a marked contrast between her feminine appearance and her not-feminine identity: her possession of privilege and property-owing individualism. In his 2004 study, John M. Sloop, drawing on Judith Halberstam's work on 'female masculinity', analyzes media representations of Janet Reno, state attorney for Dade County, arguing that she 'troubles femininity and is ideologically disciplined as a result'.[263] Though the conceptualizations of Magdalene and Reno are different – the media reports about Reno emphasize her towering frame, unfeminine female relatives, outdoorsy hobbies, unmarried status, and lack of child – the point is that both women are 'reified as outside the norm of acceptable femininity' and problematize gender conventions.[264]

The traditions relating to Mary Magdalene's conversion contribute to an understanding of the socialization of an unruly female figure. In 'Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant', Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams argue that:

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[262] Karras, *Common Women*, p. 121.
[263] John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S Culture* (Boston: University of Massachuetts Press, 2004), p. 107.
[264] Sloop, *Disciplining Gender*, pp. 107-16 (p. 110).

> [d]eviance refers to behaviour that does not accord with those expectations and norms for individual behaviour which are generally shared and recognised within a particular social system.[265]

That the pre-penitent Magdalene is 'of custume called the sinfull woman' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 469), a title which is also applied to Mary of Egypt, suggests that she is guilty of a 'breach of social rules which are commonly thought of as necessary to cohesion and order within a social group'.[266] While Hutter and Williams make the point that that the deviant woman is 'stereotypically portrayed as "sick" and not "sinful"', Magdalene's deviation from social norms is presented in terms of her sinful, rather than sick, behaviour.[267] Vice and deviance are not necessarily synonymous, but in the Magdalene legends these two concepts intersect and overlap in important ways. The heroine's implied sexual sin is closely linked to her broader transgression from normative female roles.

This emphasis on deviance is particularly evident from a reading of the *Early South English Legendary*. When the text, describing Magdalene's life in sin, states that Martha used to 'chidde hire ful ofte for hire lecherie' (l. 77), a departure from the account in Luke 10 of how Martha admonished Mary for her poor housekeeping skills, it suggests that her behaviour is regarded as beyond the pale. Though her status as a noblewoman and heiress places her in a similar position to Magdalene, she behaves differently to her sister. Rather than pursuing her 'flechses wille' (*Early South English Legendary*, l. 51), behaviour categorized as deviant in patriarchal society, Martha is shown to behave in accordance with her social station as a woman. While Martha too possesses relatively unusual freedoms, she conforms to notions of appropriate female behaviour.[268]

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[265] Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams, 'Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant', in *Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant*, ed. Hutter and Williams, The Oxford Women's Series 4 (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 9-39, pp. 12-13.

[266] Hutter and Williams, 'Controlling Women', p. 13. The *Gilte Legende* account refers to Mary of Egypt as a 'synfull woman' (p. 254). Interestingly, it also represents the saint as describing herself as a 'comune woman' (a term that shares parallels with representations of Bokenham's Magdalene) since she allowed men to 'takithe [her] body for […] hire' (p. 255). See *St Mary of Egypt*, in *Gilte Legende,* I. 254-7.

[267] Hutter and Williams, 'Controlling Women', p. 20.

[268] The narrator of the *Gilte Legende* comments approvingly that 'Martha that was wyse gouerned [right nobly] the parti of her brother and of her suster […]' (p. 469).

3. The Correction of Ambition and Purposes of Punishment

If the failure to comply with patriarchal definitions of femininity (that is, docility) can be read as an act of resistance against hierarchy itself, the narrative of Mary Magdalene's penance may be read in terms of the correction of ambition. It can be read as a moment of containment in the texts and a point at which top-down, hegemonic structures are consolidated. The protagonist is not only punished by the hagiographers for her deviant behaviour, but for exhibiting liberties precluded by her sex. The charge of 'insolence' in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (l. 5399) suggests that she has rejected the social regulations determining how a person should behave. Like Eve, the first woman to dissent against a law literally decreed *from above* (Genesis 3.6), Magdalene is forced to learn what new historicists might see as history 101: dissent is always contained and authority reinforced.[269]

While Bokenham's Magdalene outwardly acknowledges her sin (lust or uncleanness), the success of her penance functions on a more implicit level. It seems to be predicated on her coming to know, and accept, her place in a hierarchical society. Since the Wager play suggests that Magdalene's transgression lies in her thinking herself to be a 'goddesse' (l. 518) – Cupiditi tells her that 'Man is the begynnyng of his owne operation; / Ergo then of none other god's creation' (ll. 508-9) – it is relevant that she learns to behave as a subjected subject. In the context of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, this means turning away from a life of sin (interpreted in this chapter as deviance from the restrictions usually placed on women) and showing 'meke obsequyousnesse' appropriate to her sex (l. 5440). While 'obsequyousnesse' was not necessarily a pejorative term in the period (and the text does offset the description of her 'obsequyousnesse' with reference to her 'corage', l. 5442), the *OED*, providing as an example the line from Bokenham, records the meaning of: 'Ready

[269] Brannigan uses the expression 'Power always wins the game' in his discussion of the work of Greenblatt and other new historicists. Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, p. 78.

compliance or obedience; eagerness to serve or please; deference; dutiful service'.[270] In light of Magdalene's earlier representation as an unruly woman, a woman motivated by self-interest, it is possible to trace structures of containment in the presentation of Magdalene as compliant or obedient.

The texts seem to corroborate Fromm's argument that 'by adapting himself to social conditions man develops those traits that make him *desire* to act as he *has* to act'.[271] Fromm's comments correspond with Louis Althusser's 1969 model of the processes of ideology in which:

> the individual is *interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i. e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*, i. e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.[272]

One of the main differences between the ways in which the unruly female virgin martyrs are punished – they are always punished by death – and the way in which the sinful Magdalene is punished – Mirk's Magdalene is depicted as choosing to give up her possessive individualism, her property, and her implied sexual agency – relies on the different type of control being employed: 'coercive' or 'consensual'. Both forms of control, while in certain respects antithetical to one another, work to consolidate power.

In *The Modern Prince*, Antonio Gramsci discusses the '"dual perspective"' found in 'political action' and 'national life' in relation to Niccolò Machiavelli's model of the 'Centaur – half-animal and half-human', writing that this perspective combines 'levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony [and] violence and civilization […]'.[273] In his 1992 study of Gramsci's work, Paul Ransome, who draws on the above passage, discusses

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[270] 'Obsequiousness, *n*' (meaning 1) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013]. The *Middle English Dictionary* also uses this example from Bokenham to record the senses of '[h]umility; obedience, compliance'. See Kuhn (ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: O-P* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980), p. 30.
[271] Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 243.
[272] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), pp. 123-73, p. 169.
[273] Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 125-205, pp. 169, 170.

these ideas of force and consent in relation to Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony': 'a form of social and political "control" which combines physical force or *coercion* with intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion or *consent*'.[274] Relevant to the analysis in this chapter, Ransome refers to Gramsci's treatment of the different methods of 'social control', explaining that:

> *coercive control* […] is manifest through direct force or the threat of force, and *consensual control* […] arises when individuals 'willingly' or 'voluntarily' assimilate the world-view or hegemony of the dominant group; an assimilation which allows the group to be hegemonic'.[275]

As an example of 'coercive' punishment and control, Saint Cecilia, after challenging the authority of Almachien and being accused of 'gret pride', is commanded to stand in a boiling bath.[276] Since Cecilia, as a virgin, does not experience 'disese of hete', Almachien commands that she must be beheaded. Unlike Magdalene, whose punishment can be understood in terms of the internalization of social values, Cecilia's injury is physiological and externalized. Though the references to how her executioner 'smote .iij. strokes [but could] in no wise smite off her hede' suggests a metaphorical attempt to penetrate the militantly virginal female body, the point is that punishment in this legend involves an employment of force.[277] Given that Cecilia, unlike Magdalene, refuses to repent for her unruliness, her punishment serves only a retributive function.

Gramsci is not the only theoretician whose work on power and control illuminates understandings of the function of punishment in these two saints' legends. As Michel Foucault (1975) might argue, Magdalene's punishment, in contrast to Cecilia's, relies less on violent spectacle and more on the loss of freedoms. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses the 'disappearance of torture as a public spectacle'.[278] He argues that '[f]rom being

[274] Paul Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci: A New Introduction* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 135.
[275] Ransome, *Gramsci*, p. 150.
[276] *St Cecilia I*, p. 659.
[277] *St Cecilia I*, p. 660.
[278] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 7.

an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights', and this insight is relevant to a consideration of the different ways in which Magdalene and Cecilia are 'disciplined and punished' for their perceived transgressions.[279] While Cecilia's legend represents punishment in terms of punitive bodily injury and death, the emphasis in the Magdalene legend is on reform and loss of liberties (a model that finds parallels in Foucault's discussion of the role of the prison).[280]

It is debatable who is punished most severely by the hagiographers: Magdalene or Cecilia? While the question might not seem a difficult one to answer since Magdalene is not tortured for her transgression, it is possible to find in the descriptions of the repentant Magdalene what the *Age of Innocence* (1920) refers to in a different context as the 'taking [of] life ''without effusion of blood'''.[281] The sinful Magdalene is neither killed by an executioner nor 'killed off' as a character (compare Erica Jong's observation that in some later fictions transgressive – she specifically alludes to adulterous – women often die by the text's conclusion).[282] Nevertheless, Magdalene loses her spirit of unruliness and becomes contained within the structures of the narrative. As the punisher but also the punished subject, Magdalene must figuratively annihilate the part of herself which is perceived to be undesirable. In doing so, she can become the 'meek, submissive, patient, passive, virginal' ideal that Gail Ashton finds in 'medieval female hagiogaphy'.[283]

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[279] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 11.

[280] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 233. That Cecilia's punishment might be understood in light of Foucauldian ideas of punishment-as-spectacle is corroborated by a medieval illustration of the martyrdom of Saint Margaret of Antioch (another saint who is martyred in the bath). This picture represents a group of male figures as pointing at the naked saint: she is presented as the object of the gaze. See Maestro Di Crea, 'The Martyrdom of St. Margaret of Antioch', Detail, 1474-79.

[281] Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 338. Incidentally, Jansen has discussed how the *Thesaurus Novus* represented the repentant Magdalene as 'a spiritual martyr because of "the effusion of blood and daily affliction of her body"'. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 225.

[282] In '*Fear of Flying* Turns Twenty' Jong writes that her 'heroine (unlike *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* and many adulteresses of twentieth-century fiction) does *not* die at the end, nor does she lose a child for her transgression – another common formula. She lives on despite having reached out for sexual pleasure – a thing usually punishable by death in women'. Erica Jong, 'Fear of Flying Turns Twenty', in *Fear of Flying* (London: Minerva, 1994), pp. vii-x, p. viii.

[283] Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 17. Ashton comments specifically that Mirk idealizes a number of these values: 'Mirk is typical of a post-twelfth-century textual tradition which emphasizes the patient fortitude of a chaste, saintly woman who keeps her own counsel and is frequently meek, frequently passive' (p. 17).

In his discussion of the 'automatization of the individual', Fromm argues that the person who 'gives up his individual self […] need not feel alone or anxious anymore', but 'the price […] is the loss of his self'.[284] Mary Flowers Braswell makes a similar observation in *The Medieval Sinner*. She claims that the:

> reformed sinner is never an individual, but a type. His confession has stripped him of those particular sins which have made him unique.[285]

One of the arguments found in her study is that in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century penitential literature becoming penitent means becoming 'humble' but also involves becoming 'selfless and uniform'.[286] In her discussion of the dreamer from *Pearl*, Braswell writes:

> This is the lesson that all penitents must learn and that all confessors – even lay ones – must teach: man must humbly submit himself to God. Those aggressive strivings must be quelled. The dreamer must be ''halden'' – restrained, subdued. When he withdraws into himself, he will gain more knowledge of God's mysteries, but he will lose the most vital and individual factors within himself […].[287]

Braswell's reading corresponds with the discussion in this chapter of the function of punishment in the hagiographical accounts. Though the repentant Magdalene is integrated into society (she turns away from a life of sin), in Mirk's *Festial* especially, the heroine might be understood as having surrendered her social, sexual and economic freedoms, as well as her possessive individualism and unruly spirit. Whereas the *Book of the Knight of the Tower* (1483) represents Magdalene's years in the wilderness as an act of penance, the hagiographical texts depict her self-punishment in terms of the relinquishment of liberties.[288] She is contained within the structures of the narrative.

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[284] Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 178 and p. 160.
[285] Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), p. 13.
[286] Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner,* p. 58.
[287] Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner,* pp. 94-5.
[288] The text states: 'And that she sawe wel/ that she must dye & be punysshed ther for her synnes and mysdedes/ made her al ferdfull & sore abasshed/ And therefor she was thyrtty yere and more in a deserte makyng there her penaunce sorowynge and sore wepyng for her synnes and mysdedes'. See *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 132.

Part Three: Ideology, Interpellation and the Loss of Individual Freedoms

1. The Consolidation of Power

The representations of Mary Magdalene as penitent sinner suggest that the *Festial* assists in constructing what Hutter and Williams describe as the 'normal' woman: 'a person with something of a childish incapacity to govern herself and in some need of protection'.[289] While the sinful Magdalene is depicted as circumventing certain limitations usually placed on her sex (explaining her identity as counter-heroine), her conversion corresponds with her decision to pursue a more respectable life. The heroine manages to negotiate the restrictions of her gendered subject status only to later become the figure memorably described in the *Gilte Legende* as Christ's 'ostesse' (p. 470), a term which shows that this Magdalene has not surrendered her patrimony but also suggests her affinity with Luke's Martha (10. 38-40).

Stephen Greenblatt has argued, in a different example, that 'subversiveness is the very product of […] power and furthers its ends' and these insights provide important angles on the account of Magdalene's conversion.[290] While the narratives pay homage to the idea of subversion since they conceptualize the sinful Magdalene as disturbing traditional hierarchies of gender, these subversive pressures are contained when Magdalene, as she is represented cumulatively across the texts, chooses to surrender her wide range of liberties. She elects to submit to the patriarchal structures which she once countered.

It is in fact possible to sketch certain parallels between the losses of freedom experienced by the repentant Magdalene and those encountered by medieval men embarking on monastic life: *conversi*. That the heroine is presented as taking up a life of chastity, virtue and obedience (and, in *Festial*, leaving her private property) accords with those values advocated in the medieval *Rule of St Benedict* (ca. 530).[291] Ludo J. R. Milis has referred to the

[289] Hutter and Williams, 'Controlling Women', p. 12.
[290] Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets', p. 24.
[291] See Justin McCann (trans.), *The Rule of St Benedict*, Spiritual Masters (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976).

monastery as 'a dream of unreality in which the free choice to abandon self-will ideologically dominated its behavioural pattern', and this description of having 'free choice to abandon self-will' corresponds with my understandings of the narrative conceptualizations of Magdalene's conversion.[292]

This emphasis on chastity and obedience is further relevant in light of Bokenham's vocation as an Augustinian friar and Mirk's as a canon regular. Augustian friars and canon regulars both lived according to the Rule of St Augustine of Hippo (ca. 400). The *Rule of St Augustine*, which predated the *Rule of St Benedict*, similarly stressed the need for chastisty (chapter IV) and obedience (chapter VII), and this could account for the significance placed in the episode on these values.[293]

2. Women and the Narrative of the Repentant Sinner

Ross King, drawing on the work of Pierre Macherey and Etienne Balibar, has observed that:

> literature functions as a material practice that interpellates individual readers, furnishing them with an image of their place as subjects in the social world.[294]

Building on King's comments that texts socialize their readers (and audiences), the discussion below will interrogate the function of the narratives for medieval women. The primary focus lies in examining the ideological meanings invested in the episode depicting Mary Magdalene's conversion. Before doing so, it will ask: what do the conceptualizations of this figure as a sinner and, according to Bokenham, a 'comoun' woman (l. 5405) mean for the female subject outside the text?

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[292] Ludo J. R. Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men: Monasticism and its Meaning to Medieval Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), p. 62.
[293] See Robert Russell, O.S.A (trans.), 'The Rule of St. Augustine'. Available at: www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/ruleaug.html [accessed 26 August 2013].
[294] Ross King, 'Interpellation', in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory,* pp. 566-7, p. 567. For discussion of the processes of interpellation, see Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', pp. 162-4.

Approaching the texts from the contemporary critical perspective of 'pro-sex' feminism, the sinful Magdalene can be interpreted at the service of women. The protagonist might be understood as circumventing a system of patriarachal domination and control over female sexuality. And the dissident reader, whether medieval or modern, might wish to take from the narrative its most subversive implications (a mode of reading that is developed in the next chapter). Nevertheless, the unruly, and indeed sexually promiscuous, woman is as much a stock character or product of a medieval antifeminist tradition as the overly-emotional female hysteric (a complex cultural figure since mystical discourses and affective devotional practices presented favourably what could be perceived in a different context as irrationality in women).

Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* (1405), which argues for women's propensity for virtue, suggests that medieval women are kept in their place by a tradition which emphasizes that 'female nature is wholly given up to vice'.[295] In this way, the hagiographers' representations of Magdalene as a sinner and, implicitly in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, a whore, might if not turned to women's advantage (Christine suggests the possibility of reading passages at the service of females 'no matter what the author's original intention [is]') hold women back even further.[296] Coletti's analysis suggests by implication the way that the unruly Magdalene might be employed to consolidate patriarchal control. When she comments on how preachers Olivier Maillard (ca. 1430- 1502) and Michel Menot (d. 1518) employed Magdalene as an example of the dangers posed by women lacking governance, she shows the less enabling aspect of this depiction of the heroine.[297]

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[295] Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, p. 6.
[296] Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies,* p. 9.
[297] See Coletti: 'Absent parental – especially paternal – control, the dramatic Magdalene's abandonment of her castle and siblings puts her in the social position that late medieval preachers such as Olivier Maillard and Michel Menot railed against when they invoked Mary Magdalene's high birth and legendary profligate life to critique wayward daughters and the patrician families who failed to provide sufficient guidance for them'. Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere"', p. 6.

While the representations of Magdalene as a sinner might contribute in very obvious ways to a tradition of medieval misogyny (the texts cumulatively exploit anxieties about active female sexuality, women's socio-economic independence, and gendered patterns of nonconformity), 'Marie þe synnere' (*Legendys*, l. 5408) can be appropriated as an almost pro-feminist figure: a woman who, similarly to Faith's unruly woman, 'rejects authority which would subjugate her and render her docile'.[298] Although there is a difference between being unruly and being pro-feminist, the sinful Magdalene is not restrained, controlled or docile – and in this way can be seen as providing a positive example for the 'second' or 'weaker sex'.[299] This counter-heroic figure does not attack the material conditions which place women in a position of subordination nor advocate greater liberties for her less privileged 'sisters' (though in the prince of Marseilles episode she challenges a system of socio-economic inequalities), but she does deviate from approved or accepted social norms. Even if her actions do not provide a blueprint for subversion (the account of the life in sin is not a 'How to…' guide for the medieval female malcontent), her behaviour calls into question the ideological construct of the feminine, and subservient, woman. In a patriarchal, and firmly hierarchical, society, the woman who refuses to behave in line with contemporaneous definitions of respectability provides a challenge to that social order. By dint of the fact that she confronts hegemonic structures, she can be understood as a counter-heroine.

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[298] Faith, *Unruly Women*, p. 1.

[299] Natalie Zemon Davis also argues for the subversive potential of female unruliness in 'Women on Top'. Here she writes: '[s]omewhat in contradistinction to Christine de Pisan and the gallant school of feminists, I want to argue that the image of the disorderly woman did not always function to keep women in their place. On the contrary, it was a multivalent image that could operate, first, to widen behavioural options for women within and even outside marriage, and, second, to sanction riot and political disobedience for both men and women in a society that allowed the lower orders few formal means of protest. Play with the unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power in society'. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: eight essays* (London: Ducksworth, 1975), p. 131. Winstead draws briefly on the passage above to argue that '[b]ecause their rebellious heroines were also saints, virgin martyr legends could easily be interpreted as sanctioning social disruptiveness'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs,* p. 110.

Whereas the narrative accounts of the sinful Magdalene are overdetermined, corroborating antifeminist arguments about women's natural inclination towards vice but also providing women with a model of freedom from male control, representations of her as a converted sinner have a more troubling ideological function. If women are taught to view Magdalene as an example to be emulated (though Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg notes that the female saint was only expected to be imitated if she did not provide 'too "extreme"' an example), the conceptualization of the non-compliant woman saved or reformed by a male authority figure is clearly problematic.[300] Schaberg, commenting more broadly on the 'patriarchal ideologies and structures' at work in Magdalene's legend, writes:

> For men, there is a reassurance […]: you have nothing to fear from such a strong woman. For women, a message concerning salvation (from female sexuality) and protection by the male (Jesus, the church authorities).[301]

This understanding of the legend and its politics is especially relevant in light of Robinson's later representation of the penitent Magdalene. When *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1620) memorably describes Magdalene as 'our distress'd Andromede' (l. 1008), it constructs her as a passive and dependent female figure.[302] Just as Colette Dowling in her 1982 discussion of the 'Cinderella Complex' argues that women are taught that they 'may venture out on [their] own for a while' but 'some day someone will come along to rescue [them] from the anxieties of authentic living', the text represents Magdalene as needing a 'Perseus' figure (l. 1007) to save her from a life of sin (associated in the medieval texts with autonomy).[303]

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[300] Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex,* p. 2.
[301] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene,* p. 98. Schaberg is specifically referring to those accounts found in the *Legenda aurea* and Cistercian *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha.*
[302] Indeed, the account describes how Christ dispossessed Magdalene's spirits and '[w]ith milk-white hand, hee by ye hand her tooke, / And stayd her faintinge head, and bad her cheare' (ll. 991-2). Having received 'comforte' from the 'Musicke of his voice' (l. 1000), Magdalene 'humbly' asks that 'shee with him might lieu, / That did her soule from Hell and death repreiue' (ll. 1002-3).
[303] Colette Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* (London: Fontana, 1982), p. 13 and pp. 13-14. Although Robinson's Christ specifically saves Magdalene from the torments of the spirits (who claim to 'punish sinners in ye lake of fire', l. 929), he also delivers her from sin since he tells her to '[r]epent […]; and to sin heere after, bee affrayd!' (l. 1006). The protagonist might thus be understood as having been rescued by Christ on two levels: she is rescued from sin and from the punishment for sin.

When considered together the different narratives representing Mary Magdalene's conversion seem to play a 'backlash' function. Susan Faludi's model suggests that the backlash works by:

> [standing] the truth boldly on its head and [proclaiming] that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall. [304]

Taking this into account, it is probably no coincidence that the sinful Magdalene is conceptualized as possessing some of the freedoms which social historians have said were available to certain women of the period.[305] I referred in chapter one to Dollimore's and Sinfield's arguments that issues of subversion and containment are determined by historical contexts, and the changing roles of women in the later Middle Ages is relevant here. S. H. Rigby, following the work of historians including P. J. P. Goldberg, says that 'the century after the Black Death was one when women enjoyed a growing economic independence' and refers to the later Middle Ages 'as a golden age for women'.[306] Further, he discusses scholarship which suggests that the later Middle Ages saw 'relatively low fertility produced by a tendency to "late" marriage and by a high proportion of women never marrying' and arguments that 'in an era of higher mortality and low male replacement rates' women were 'now more likely to acquire land, either as heiresses or by their widow's right of dower'.[307] These insights suggest that an increasing number of women might have benefitted from the social, sexual and economic liberties enjoyed by the sinful Magdalene. The hagiographers' decisions to represent Magdalene's voluntary conversion thus seem particularly troubling. Though the *Legenda aurea* also presents the narrative account of Mary Magdalene's

[304] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against Women* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 12.
[305] Winstead also reads the (earlier) Middle English virgin martyr legends in relation to the changing socio-economic structures of late-medieval society. As she argues, the 'martyr legends spoke simultaneously to the gender-based fears and aspirations of late-medieval men and women at a time when women's economic activities threatened to undermine traditional definitions of a woman's place. With the growth of a market economy during the later thirteenth century, women's opportunity to gain some measure of economic autonomy expanded'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs,* p. 105.
[306] S. H. Rigby, 'Introduction: Social structure and economic change in late medieval Europe', in *A Social History of England*, pp. 1-31, p. 16. The term 'golden age for women' was applied by C. M. Barron in 1989.
[307] Rigby, 'Introduction', pp. 16, 17. Rigby's discussion of low fertility is derived from the work of historians including L. R. Poos and R. M. Smith and his comments regarding female acquisition of land draws on the work of historians such as Goldberg.

conversion, the text does not discuss Magdalene's penance in the detail found in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and discredits the tradition of her estrangement from John the Evangelist (a tradition that contributes strongly to understandings of her circumvention of male control).

Jansen has argued that the *Legenda aurea* Magdalene *vita* was influenced by a '[m]edieval gender discourse' that demonstrated the 'necessity of controlling, guiding, subjecting, and supervising women' (a chilling observation given the function of the later Magdalene asylums).[308] Her comments are particularly relevant to an understanding of the narrative account of Magdalene's conversion. What also needs to remembered, though, is that Bokenham was writing for a predominantly female readership. The life of Mary Magdalene, as the poet notes in his *prologe*, is dedicated to 'dame Isabel, þe countesse of Hu' (l. 5356) and the legendary, containing only the lives of women saints, refers to a number of influential female patrons including Elizabeth 'of Oxenforthe, þe countesse' (l. 5054).

Both Elizabeth and Isabel were well-connected women who belonged to politically-active families. Isabel Bourchier, described by Delany as 'the most highly placed and well-descended of [Bokenham's] patrons', was descended from both King Pedro of Spain and Edward III. Her father was executed as a result of his alleged involvement in the Southampton plot of 1415 (he had purportedly attempted to replace Henry V with Edmund Mortimer, his brother-in-law). She was also the sister of Richard, the duke of York, and had married into another powerful family. Her husband, Henry Bourchier, who, like Isabel,

[308] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 184. James M. Smith's 2007 study of Magdalene asylums in Ireland, institutions for 'fallen women' which he dates back to 1767, alludes to recent understandings of 'the Magdalen asylums as prisonlike institutions wherein women were incarcerated against their wills'. Although Smith says that in Ireland in the nineteenth century this was not usually the case, the Magdalene asylums have been associated with the tyrannical social control of women. Esther de Boer comments briefly on *The Magdalene Sisters*, a film with factual basis that 'shows how in the twentieth century unmarried mothers and extremely attractive girls were shut up in convents to do penance for the rest of their lives in the name of Mary Magdalene'. James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 25 and p. 30; and de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, p. 6.

descended from Edward III, was to eventually become treasurer of England and earl of Essex in 1455 and 1461-81 respectively.[309]

Elizabeth Vere (ca. 1410-75), born Elizabeth Howard, was married to the twelfth earl of Oxford. Her husband and her son, Aubrey, were executed in 1462 for alleged treason. Elizabeth's father, John Howard, had been duke of Norfolk and had been known in royal circles.[310]

In light of this issue of patronage, the representation of Magdalene as having chosen to give up her freedoms appears especially insidious. The texts, which seem to function at the service of power, would only succeed in socializing women to surrender their liberties if women, and particularly women of influence, were exposed to them. When the Magdalene of these three texts – two of which we know to have male authors – expresses contrition for sins, she provides women with an ideal of conformity to definitions of respectable female behaviour.

3. The Conversion Narrative, Ambition, and Nonconformity

The chapter has focussed so far on the possible implications of the narrative of Mary Magdalene's repentance for the 'second sex', but gender politics are not all that are at stake in the texts. The first chapter explained that while this thesis has a feminist bent, it is not only concerned with issues pertaining to women. Moving beyond a gender reading, this section will consider the politics of the conversion narrative in the context of questions of aspiration and also nonconformity. Jansen has shown that identification with Magdalene was not exclusive to females (she argues that the medieval male friars appropriated this figure), and the discussion below will examine the repercussions of the analysis for a different social group: upwardly-mobile men and women.[311]

[309] Delany, *Impolitic Bodies,* pp. 21-22 (p. 21).
[310] See Delany, *Impolitic Bodies,* pp. 17-19.
[311] See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 85-99.

Given that this chapter reads the unruly Magdalene as exhibiting ambitious, and thus aberrant, behaviour, she can be compared in some respects to the upwardly mobile classes of late-medieval England (a group to which Coletti has argued that Digby's character Curiosity belongs). Before developing this reading, it is necessary to add a careful proviso: categories such as class, race and gender do not displace one another in a straightforward or unproblematic way. While it is not entirely uncommon to come across descriptions of women as a class, being female is not synonymous with belonging to a lower class or as having black skin.[312] As post-colonial critics such as bell hooks would no doubt argue, the oppression metaphor model where being female is equated with being lower class is questionable because some women live in the colonial periphery, are poor and lack a formal education, and do not possess the agency that is 'written on' white skin. These women are marginal or marginalized in every possible sense of the word.[313] What I wish to argue is that Magdalene, a figure who is conceptualized in the three texts as nobly born and as possessing privileges facilitated by a noble birth, might share *certain* similarities with the aspirational classes who were attempting to better themselves socially.

In Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale* (ca. 1380-1400), a text that Stephen Knight has labelled 'morally reprehensible' and characterized by 'venom', the unruly peasant, Symond, is punished by his class superiors John and Aleyn, as well as by Chaucer the narrator, for demonstrating the sort of ambitious behaviour shown by the sinful Magdalene.[314] Though there is not a direct relationship between these texts, a reading of the Chaucer *tale* furthers understandings of this episode from hagiography. Just as Magdalene can be understood as the

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[312] In *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter, discussing Sade's Juliette, writes: 'She is the token woman in person. Noirceuil told her it must be so: "…intellect, talent, wealth, and influence raise some of the weak from the class into which Nature placed them"'. Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p. 117.

[313] In her introduction to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks criticizes Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) for '[making] her plight and the plight of white women like herself synonymous with a condition affecting all American women'. She argues that Friedan's model of '"the problem that has no name"' refers only to 'the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women – housewives bored with leisure'. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd edn (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 2 and p. 1.

[314] Knight, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 94.

recipient of liberties more often enjoyed by a male ruling elite, Symond is conceptualized as an 'ape': a man whose achieved status gained through his occupation and marriage to the daughter of a parson exists in conflict with his ascribed identity as a peasant.[315] That Symond is depicted as socially mobile is important since the text ends with the description of him being disciplined for his proud behaviour:

> Thus is the proude millere wel ybete,
> And hath ylost the gryndynge of the whete,
> […]
> His wyf is swyved, and his doghter als. [316]

It is possible to argue that the social climbing classes of late-medieval society might derive a similar moral from the narrative account of Mary Magdalene's conversion. Coletti's analysis makes no reference to the upwardly-mobile Curiosity being punished for his ambitious behaviour and this is interesting since Magdalene certainly seems to be disciplined by the hagiographers.[317] Her unruliness is contained within the structures of the narrative. Although the ending of the episode differs from the denouement of the *Reeve's Tale*, both Symond and Magdalene come to learn that 'pride ever goes before a fall' (*Proverbs* 16. 18). Chaucer, describing Symond's fight with Aleyn, writes that 'doun he fil' and Bokenham's account of Magdalene's penance describes how Magdalene 'gan to wepe, / And fel down' (ll. 5428-9).[318] Both Magdalene and Symond seem to be punished for deviating against hierarchy or what Horrox calls 'the very essence of order'.[319]

The late-medieval Magdalene texts represent what Dowling in her explication of the 'Cinderella complex' describes as the 'Collapse of Ambition'.[320] The narrative traditions of

[315] Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale,* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 78-84, l. 3935.
[316] Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale*, ll. 4313-17.
[317] Coletti implies instead that Magdalene is punished since: 'From its outset Mary Magdalene's moral downfall is […] expressed in the common parlance of social connection among the prosperous and aspiring classes of late medieval England, who cultivated the trappings and terminology of feudal ties long after these had lost their commanding influence over the structure of socioeconomic relationships. Appealing to Mary Magdalene's pride in her worldly station, Satan attempts to bring about eternal comeuppance in status for the gentlewoman.' Coletti, '"Curtesy Doth It Yow Lere"', p. 7.
[318] Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale*, l. 4281.
[319] Horrox, 'Service', p. 61.
[320] Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex,* p. 14. Dowling uses this heading to describe to describe her 'retreat into housewifery' and her return to 'woman's traditional role of helper' (pp. 15, 16).

Magdalene's conversion not only function to discipline ambitious factions inside and outside the texts, but also seem to punish deviant or nonconformist behaviour. In the same way that the *Early South English Legendary* describes how Martha used to 'chide [Magdalene] ful ofte' for her sin (l. 77), the texts are also implicated in a form of social constructivism.

Hagiography belongs to what Althusser calls the 'Ideological State Apparatus' and as a result operates as a form of consensual control.[321] Just as this chapter has suggested that Magdalene is represented as punishing herself when she surrenders her freedoms (she is also, arguably, punished by the hagiographers), so the subject outside the text is called upon to keep him- or herself in check. [322] The outcome of self-discipline is that the kind of control by force employed in the virgin martyr narratives need not be applied. Delany has described the burning of several heretics following the legislative *De comburendo haereticis* (1401), and in a late-medieval period in which coercive control was a political reality the texts provide an alternative model where the person, to use Ransome's phrase, '"willingly" or "voluntarily" assimilate[s] the world-view or hegemony of the dominant group'.[323] The *Festial* even begins by telling '[g]ode men' that Magdalene's 'penaunce and repentyng' provides a 'myrroure to alle synful' to show how they might do 'penaunce for hur trespace' and 'recoure grace a3eyn'

[321] See Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' on the differences between the Repressive State Apparatus which functions 'by violence' and the Ideological State Apparatuses which function by ideology (p. 138).

[322] It is worth noting that Magdalene is literally represented in some texts as calling upon the sinner to repent. Just as the account in the *Gilte Legende* (but not those in the *Festial* or the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*) describes how Magdalene appeared to a 'clerke of Flaundres that hight Steven' (p. 480) and told him to repent for his sins and 'be reconciled to God' (p. 480), the *Gesta Romanorum* contains a similar episode. In this short passage, Magdalene appears on 'seynte marie Magdaleyns Euyn' to a woman in her sleep and tells her that 'she shuld haue no merite of here fastyng, till she were confessid of here synne'. The woman then 'wente, and shrove here, and did penaunce, and was sauyd'. Sidney J. H. Herrtage (ed.), *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, EETS E.S. 33 (London: Trübner, 1879), p. 394.

[323] Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, p. 9 and Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci*, p. 150. While I am arguing that consensual control (self-discipline as a result of interpellation) and coercive control (violent punishment, as instanced in the burning of heretics) exist as two different forms of control, Paul Strohm's discussion of *De heretico comburendo* reads the burnings from an alternative angle. He suggests that the burnings can be interpreted as a moment where the 'perceived difference between speech and action' is called into question. According to his understanding, the 'marked *performative content* of the verbalizations of the 1380s and 1390s found its counterpart in the extensive *symbolic content* of the early fifteenth century'. See Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 21 and p. 28.

and 'ofte myche more' (p. 184). By opening this way, the text reveals its ideological investment in the 'discipline and punish' theme.

That Magdalene is shown to repent for her deviant behaviour is relevant to understandings of the politics of nonconformity. In his seminal text *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argues that:

> the mere act of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric.[324]

The decision of the hagiographers, Mirk and Bokenham particularly, to present implicitly what Fromm describes as the 'automatization' of the individual spirit is highly problematic[325] The accounts of Magdalene's conversion not only seem to function to the detriment of ambitious individuals (medieval men and women who might support secular revolt or who might, less radically, attempt to capitalize on the changing socio-economic conditions in post-Black-Death England), but any person who dares to thinks for him- or herself.[326] Though individual thought might not be dangerous *per se*, it must be remembered that the texts were produced in a cultural moment characterized by anxieties about heresy and dissent (an issue picked up in the next chapter). When Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438), a woman who is 'no mayden', stands before the Archbishop in white clothes, her decision is not just seen as a

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[324] John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-115, p. 67.
[325] Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 178.
[326] While there is not existing historical evidence to show that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers and audiences would have understood the socio-economic transferability of Mary Magdalene's ambition, Winstead has discussed, in *Virgin Martyrs*, the issue of transferability in relation to the virgin martyr legends. She argues that medieval social theory visualized society as 'a system of interlocking and closely analogous hierarchies' (p. 109). Since 'hierarchies were commonly related to one another', 'the virgin martyr's disruption of the gender hierarchy could stand for a spectrum of activities that threatened traditional relations of dominion and subordination, particularly in the years following the Black Death – activities ranging from workers' defiance of labour statutes to the social strivings of civil servants and bureaucrats such as Chaucer' (pp. 109-10). Although Winstead also refers to the lack of documentary evidence showing the interpretation and uses of virgin martyr legends, she contends that 'such heroines as William Paris's Christine or the *North English Legendary*'s Anastasia helped *create* a milieu in which wives were prone to argue about theology; workers, to defy labor statutes; and haberdashers, to flout sumptuary laws' (p. 111).

flouting of convention or an act of individual will. That she is branded a 'fals heretyke' demonstrates that her nonconformity threatens the cornerstone of medieval order. [327]

Summary

The ideology of the narrative accounts of Mary Magdalene's sin and repentance seems to function in the most repressive sense of the term. Dollimore and Sinfield have argued that:

> [t]he principal strategy of ideology is to legitimate inequality and exploitation by representing the social order that perpetuates these things as immutable and unalterable – as decreed by God or simply natural. [328]

Likewise, this chapter has suggested that the texts attempt to preserve an inequitable *status quo* by keeping power with a dominant hegemonic group and punishing the individual who attempts to transcend his or her place in society. The narratives represent Magdalene, a counter-heroic figure who challenges patriarchal structures, as choosing to give up her unusual privileges. Corresponding with John Audeley's (d. ca. 1426) claim in the early fifteenth century that '[i]t is the best, early and late / [e]ach man [to] keep his own estate', I have argued that the episode legitimizes a conservative vision of social order.[329] While the analysis points out the potential for reading the sinful Magdalene at the service of women, it finds in the texts a conceptualization of power which corroborates Greenblatt's model. An image of subversion is created, but only so that a top-down system of hierarchical relations – both inside and outside the texts – can be consolidated. Mary Magdalene the sinner is represented as a counter- figure in the field of gender politics, but the episode ends with the containment of this unruly heroine (a pattern introduced in the first chapter).

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[327] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), p. 124. Compare Lynn Staley's understanding of the way in which Margery's nonconformity threatens medieval social order: 'Her personal relationship with Jesus leads her to espouse a radical social gospel that threatens the very basis for town life, for Kempe intimates that an orientation towards profit, an investment in qualities like stability and hierarchical ordering, and an urge towards conformist codes of dress and behaviour underlie the medieval conception of community. What Kempe therefore presents Margery as threatening is the *concept* of community, that tacit covenant with uniformity that too often defines human relations. Lynn Staley, 'Introduction', in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Staley, pp. 1-16, p. 2.
[328] Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 114. This chapter is co-written with Dollimore.
[329] John Audeley, cited in Maddern, 'Social Mobility', p. 115.

Chapter Three: 'It's all about power, about the power the new church is to be based on': Interrogating the Tensions over Spiritual Leadership in the Accounts of the Pre-Ascension Life and Apostolic Narrative

Feminist interpretation reads against the current of contemporary criticism […] in which the women at the tomb disappear from history and/or their role from serious theological consideration. Our educated assumption is that an androcentric telling and stereotypes, and centuries of androcentric interpretation, have garbled and diminished and all but erased the contribution of wo/men. This directs us to read gaps and slippages in the texts, to map out ancient and contemporary strategies of suppression and resistance, to test what [Virginia] Woolf calls the 'atmosphere' of values.
Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 2002, pp. 258-9

In Margaret George's novel *Mary Called Magdalene* (2002), the eponymous heroine writes in her testament about an encounter which took place in the period after Christ's Ascension. During her stay at the Church at Galilee, where she (as a former disciple) has been invited to guide and edify local Christians, the protagonist is asked by a young man if it is true that 'Peter got a special commission from Jesus'. Mary recounts:

> 'I don't think so', I answered, trying very hard to remember what Jesus had said about Peter in front of us. And it would have to be in front of us, if he was supposed to have primacy. I remembered Jesus predicting the end of Peter's life, about his being led where he did not wish to go. I remembered his telling Peter to 'feed my sheep'. But that was not specific nor did it give him any authority.

While Mary certainly does not claim that primacy for herself, she calls into question rumours that 'Jesus designated a successor' and says that all of Jesus' disciples (rather than just Peter) were 'given the power to heal people […] when he sent [them] out on a mission'.[330]

Mary's hesitancy over the truth of Peter's 'primacy' among the disciples – and thus his spiritual authority over them and the rest of the Church – is central to this chapter. For this hesitancy is repeated again and again in the Middle English Mary Magdalene hagiographies I examine in this chapter. These texts, and the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* in particular, can be read alongside late-medieval discourses advocating greater spiritual authority for women and non-clerics. Although it would be an overstatement to trace a pro-Lollard perspective in

[330] George, *Mary Called Magdalene*, p. 823.

the narratives, the *vitae* (which include representations of a woman, Mary Magdalene, preaching) are reflective of a cultural moment characterized by heresy and dissent. While Peter remains a figure of powerful spiritual authority in these tales, some of the ideas emerging from these texts intersect with anti-clerical and / or 'pro-women priests' arguments being forcefully disseminated by groups including Lollards. Therefore, as chapter two argued that Magdalene countered hegemonic structures in the field of sexual politics, so this chapter argues for her potential as a counter-heroine in the field of theology, specifically interrogating the treatments of primacy and pre-eminence as they appear in the late-medieval *vitae*.

In *The Making of the Magdalen*, Jansen devotes attention to textual, as well as non-textual, treatments of what she calls the 'Peter-Magdalen tension' (tensions which she relates to the question of visionary versus institutional authority).[331] Beginning by tracing the conflict over authority in the gnostic gospels and drawing on Elaine Pagels' seminal study of these texts, Jansen argues that the 'Magdalen represents the gnostic bid for leadership in the Christian community that challenged the episcopal authority of Peter's successors'.[332] In an essentialist construction, Jansen notes that Magdalene, 'to whom Christ had appeared first and whom he had charged to announce the good news of the resurrection', can be read as a symbol of a potential ecclesiastical authority 'based on feminine principles of vision, prophecy, and spiritual understanding (*sapientia*)' and Peter, 'the rock upon which Christ had built the Church, bestowed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and granted the power to bind and loose', can be interpreted as representing the rival 'male principles of apostolic tradition, hierarchy, and acquired knowledge (*scientia*)'.[333]

Later, referring to how conflicts over spiritual authority are represented in the *Legenda aurea* and a corresponding fourteenth-century fresco in a church in Pontresina, Jansen observes that '[t]hough the Magdalen may have been *apostolorum apostola*, it was never to

[331] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 190.
[332] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 28. Jansen attributes this specific point to Pagels.
[333] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 27.

be forgotten that Peter, prince of the apostles, represented the authority of the institutional Church', maintaining that 'though Mary Magdalen may have preached and converted pagan souls, nonetheless she bowed to Rome and Saint Peter when it came to explicating the intricacies of the faith'.[334] Consequently, Jansen finds a resolution in representations of gender and power: she argues that while the late-medieval period accepted Magdalene's apostolic role, Magdalene was understood to be deferential to Peter.[335]

Like Jansen, this chapter will also examine representations of the conflict between Magdalene and Peter for authority. Following Jansen, my reading identifies a disjuncture between Magdalene's important role in the resurrection narrative (in which Bokenham's Magdalene is given the role of *apostolorum apostola*) and the post-resurrection account (in which she is shown to defer to Peter, who is not always associated with Rome in the texts which I examine, when it comes to teaching the prince about Christianity).

I am, however, less sure that medieval hagiography overall provides a resolution to the Peter-Mary Magdalene conflict. Although the narrative patterns which Jansen identifies are correct, the issue of Magdalene's earlier primacy and implied authority remains a troubling presence in the medieval texts; the attempted resolutions remain unconvincing.[336] Dissident readers, from the medieval period and present day, might take from the texts more transgressive understandings of Magdalene's spiritual primacy.

Chapter one refers to the possibility for dissident reading and this idea is elaborated in the discussion which follows. The epigraph from Schaberg's study points towards a way of

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[334] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 189.
[335] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 189-90.
[336] While Jansen argues, in *The Making of the Magdalen*, that the 'later medieval period found ingenious strategies to finesse' the Peter-Magdalene tensions (p. 45), a comment that anticipates her later insights into how the *Legenda aurea* resolved the conflicts over religious authority, she acknowledges that 'medieval discussions that focused on Mary Magdalen's apostolic authority continued to reveal tensions concerning [the question of visionary versus institutional authority] in the Christian church' (p. 45). Her study discusses, for example, the way in which the 'Magdalen-identified friars' in the thirteenth century presented 'a clear challenge to the institutional authority of Peter' (p. 85), suggesting that 'the friars, unlike the Gnostics, […] found a way to incorporate themselves and their charismatic (read: female) brand of authority into the body of the Church while simultaneously remaining separate and apart: the solution was an oath of obedience to the Church hierarchy' (p. 85).

reading theological narratives that is alert to 'gaps and slippages', which are, of course, key deconstructionist strategies.[337] The analysis examines what Alan Sinfield calls 'faultlines' in the representations of power and authority in the pre-Ascension life and apostolic narrative. These include instances in the texts where it is possible to observe 'awkward, unresolved issues, […] ones in which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute'.[338] At these moments, ostensibly conservative treatments of the religious authority theme have the potential to raise subversive questions about the top-down structure of the medieval Church, a hegemonic structure governed over by the successors of Peter. Though the texts ostensibly legitimize Petrine, and thus clerical / patriarchal, power, spaces are created for more subversive understandings of spiritual authority. At a historical moment characterized by anxieties about religious dissent, some of the hagiographical images (relating to, for example, Magdalene's implied apostolic role) might lend themselves to heterodox causes.

The first part of this chapter examines what can be called Magdalene's 'firstness' or pre-eminence in relation to representations of her as recipient of the protophany (the sighting of the resurrected Christ) and, in Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, the figure explicitly called upon by Christ to tell the disciples about the Resurrection. This part engages with some twentieth-century scholarship which relates Peter's authority in the Church to his first sighting to suggest the significance of hagiographical representations of Magdalene as First Witness.

The second part, focussing on the post-Ascension narrative, introduces the turn in the texts: the moment in which Magdalene's special status is denied or at least substantially diminished. Following on from Jansen, as well as Lawrence Clopper (2001), this part of the investigation examines the ways in which Magdalene is 'made subordinate' to Peter, arguing

[337] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 259.
[338] Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 47.

that she is no longer shown to be *first* in terms of power and authority.[339] And yet though Magdalene's implied primacy is contained by the writers, the forces of subversion still make their presence felt within the texts and they make it possible for the dissident reader, medieval or modern, to deconstruct the suppression of the authors and reanimate the subversion, with the consequence that the texts' representations of spiritual leadership can be opened up to questioning.[340]

The third part returns to the overarching questions of ideology and interpellation and interrogates the politics of conceptualization for women and non-ordained, non-clerical factions outside the text. If, as Jonathon Knight suggests, the process of (theological) exegesis involves asking '[*c*]*ui bono?*' the depiction of Magdalene's residual, though retracted, spiritual authority could be interpreted as a force potentially at the service of medieval women and non-clerics.[341] It argues that developing to their fullest plausible conclusions representations of Magdalene's spiritual authority, it might be possible to draw comparisons with some of the ideas coming out of certain anti-institutional Church discourses in contemporaneous cultural circulation including Lollardy. The investigation, which includes consideration of Magdalene's preaching, examines the implications with regard to the issue of women and the priesthood.

Since the analysis in this chapter focuses most on the narrative account found in Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, I provide in appendices 2.2 and 2.3 those extracts depicting the Resurrection scene and elevation of Peter to a role of pre-eminent authority.

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[339] Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English festive culture in the medieval and early modern period* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 242.

[340] John Brannigan, describing his understanding of the way in which cultural materialist analysis differs from new historicist analysis, writes that for cultural materialists 'traces of [subversion] remain which enable the dissident […] critic to raise the spectre of this subversion again, and thereby contest the location and interpretation of that text in current discourses'. Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, p. 166.

[341] See Knight: '*Cui bono?* is a familiar phrase to New Testament scholars. In the present context we must ask to whose advantage [specific] additions are made'. Jonathon Knight, 'The Portrait of Mary in the *Ascension of Isaiah*', in *Which Mary?*, pp. 91-106, p. 103.

Part One: The Pre-Ascension Account and the Issue of Pre-eminence

1. The Resurrection Scene

Peter's claim to primacy can be understood to legitimize the position of the papacy, with its political and economic powers, as well as justifying masculine power within the Church, as his primacy guarantees the authority of the Church's patriarchal structures. This section sketches out the representations of Magdalene as recipient of the protophany and argues that conceptualizations of Magdalene as the first person to have seen Christ after he rose from the dead are important in the light of broader questions about spiritual authority. In both her realised and implied spiritual primacy, she can be seen to operate as a counter to Peter and his successors, opening the door to greater power for women and non-clerics.[342] While Mirk's *Festial,* the *Gilte Legende* and Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* represent Mary Magdalene as the First Witness (though the hagiographies do not actually use a term like this), it is certainly not the case that all medieval writers represent this figure as having

[342] An unpublished MA thesis in Religious Studies by Rachel D. Owen also discusses the significance of the protophany to debates about apostolicity, succession, and women's roles in the Church. Owen, whose analysis of the gospels is informed by the ideas of Elaine Pagels, Ann Graham Brock, and Jane Schaberg, argues that '*if* Jesus himself chose to bestow authority upon a woman (by appearing first to her, as a premier appearance was a sign of favor and authority), a challenge to the woman who prefers the pulpit to the pew becomes problematic'. See Owen's chapters entitled 'The Canonical Mary' (pp. 9-28) and 'Apostolic Dispute' (pp. 50-68): Rachel D. Owen, 'Mary of Magdala: The Evolution of an Image' [Unpublished MA thesis (Georgia State University)], *Religious Studies Theses* (2007). Paper 5 > http.//digitalarchive.gsu/edu/rs_theses/5 [accessed 7 August 2013], p. 26.

received the privilege of the first sighting.[343] Nicholas Bozon's late-thirteenth-century *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*, like the *Book of Margery Kempe* (ca. 1436-8), says that Magdalene had the 'grace' (l. 109) of seeing the resurrected Christ before everyone except for his 'dulce mere' (the Virgin Mary) (l. 111); the *Early South English Legendary*, the *South English Legendary* and the *Scottish Legendary*, however, choose not to represent the episode of her encounter with the risen Saviour (they do not necessarily obscure it) and so they leave the question of her primacy as First Witness open.[344]

Complicating this issue further, 'Of the Resurrection', an insertion in the Cotton manuscript of the fourteenth-century *Cursor Mundi*, represents Magdalene as having had the *first* first sighting while suggesting that Peter also had a first sighting since '[f]irst to Peter he aperyd/ Of his desciples alle', an appearance that was 'in priuete' and one in which 'what þai saide' has gone unrecorded.[345] That Magdalene saw Christ first is shown in the lines:

> þis was þe first time
> þat iesus, heuen kynge,
> Schewed til anyman
> after his vp-risyng.
> A grete honour to wymmen
> did he in þat cas
> (ll. 252-7).

The representation of Peter and Magdalene as both receiving a first sighting is not uncommon. Perhaps in order to circumvent what is perceived by some writers to be the

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[343] William Thomas Kessler makes the important point that 'witness' is a *double-entendre*' since it can 'mean to see something or to testify about the thing seen'. While Kessler notes that 'it is not unnatural to suppose that the one who has seen would testify, the one who testifies would have seen', he acknowledges that this 'ambivalence' has implications with regard to the 'translation and interpretation' of texts. Though I use 'First Witness' to mean the first person to have seen Christ, it should be noted that this alternative understanding of the term would impact on the arguments provided in this chapter: neither the *Festial*, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* nor the *Gilte Legende* explicitly represent Magdalene as the first person to have testified about the Resurrection events (though this implication can be found in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*). See William Thomas Kessler, *Peter as the First Witness of the Risen Lord: An Historical and Theological Investigation*, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 37 (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1998), p. 11.

[344] In the *Book of Margery Kempe*, the resurrected Christ says to the Virgin: '"Modir, be yowr leve I must go spekyn wyth Mary Mawdeleyn"'. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 187.

[345] See Rev. Richard Morris (ed.), Cotton Insertion, *Of the Resurrection*, in *Cursor Mundi (The Cursor O the World: a Northumbrian poem of the 14th century*, EETS O. S. 62 (London: Trübner, 1876), III. 985-91, ll. 316-17, l. 313 and l. 314.

problem of Magdalene's earliest sighting, it is not entirely unusual to see Peter identified as First Witness of the Twelve.

The earliest of the three texts examined in this thesis, Mirk's *Festial* (1380s), states that 'whan [Christ] rosse from deth to lyfe, he aperud to hur [Magdalene] bodyly furste of alle othyr and suffred hur to touche hym an cussyn hys fette' (p. 185). Leaving aside for now the description of Magdalene as the 'furste' recipient of a sighting of the resurrected Christ, what is particularly significant is that Mirk never represents the *noli me tangere* speech.[346] Where the Gospel of John states that Christ told Magdalene 'Do not cling to me thus; I have not yet gone up to my Father's side' (20. 17), the use of the word 'suffyryd' shows that Magdalene is permitted to perform the act. Far from forbidding Magdalene to touch him, the *Festial* version says Christ allowed her to do just that.

Although this might seem a small detail, Esther de Boer argues that 'the great question of the church fathers is: why may not Mary Magdalene [according to John 20. 17] touch the risen Lord, whereas he invites Thomas to touch him?' She provides the answer that:

> most church fathers think that Mary Magdalene did not yet believe in the divinity of Jesus whereas Thomas did. She says 'rabbiouni' to Jesus, which means 'my Master', whereas Thomas says 'my Lord and my God'.[347]

The biblical phrasing can thus be interpreted as a reflection on Magdalene's lack of faith. Taking these interpretations, it is possible that the *Festial* omission of the *noli me tangere* restriction may imply a higher view, by Christ, of Magdalene's status in relation to the Incarnation. If Mirk is aware of traditions that the Johannine Magdalene cannot touch Jesus

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[346] It should, incidentally, be noted that the text does allow for the possibility that Christ might have made an earlier non-'bodyly' appearance to someone else, possibly the Virgin. See Reames' explanatory footnote to the comment '*He aperud to hur bodyly furste of alle othyr*' in which she draws attention to the fact that MS H 2417 'inserts "after His moder" after "first"'. Reames argues that the 'qualification *bodyly* [reminds the reader] that there was a medieval tradition which claimed that the Virgin Mary saw her resurrected Son in a vision even before Mary Magdalen encountered him in the flesh'. Reames, 'Explanatory Notes to Mirk's Sermon on St. Mary Magdalen', in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, pp. 98-100, p. 99. For further discussion on this theme, see Jansen's subsection 'Mary Magdalen or the Virgin Mary?': Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 59-62.

[347] de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, p. 103. Esther de Boer does acknowledge some other answers to this thorny theological problem: 'Origen of Alexandria expressed the view that perhaps the Lord was only partially risen when he appeared to Mary and was wholly risen when he let Thomas see him' (p. 103).

because she lacks faith or knowledge of a central Christian doctrine, that the man Jesus is also God, then the fact that his Magdalene is permitted to touch Christ might be interpreted as a more positive (pro-woman) representation of events and of Magdalene's capacity to understand complex theological truths as well as one of his male disciples can.[348]

While the *Gilte Legende* provides less detail than the *Festial*, the narrator still presents Magdalene as playing an important part in the Resurrection. She is linked again to the central events which secured human salvation: Christ's Crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.[349] In a section which begins with description of the many 'gret tokenes of loue' that Christ showed Magdalene (p. 470), the text states:

> 'This Mari,' saiethe he [Ambrose], 'is she that wisshe the fete of oure Lorde and wyped hem withe her here and anointed hem withe precious oynementes and dede solempne penaunce in tyme of grace and was the furste that chase the beste partye, that satte atte the fete of oure Lorde and herde his wordes. This is she that anointed his hede, that atte the passion was besyde the crosse, that made redy the oynementes and wolde anointe hys body and parted not fro the sepulcre, to whom Ihesu Crist appered furst whan he arose from dethe to lyff, and she was felawe to the aposteles.' (p. 470).

It is relevant that the author defers to, or claims to be deferring to, the *auctoritas* of Ambrose when depicting Magdalene as First Witness. Rather than saying that 'whan [Christ] rosse from deth to lyfe, he aperud to her bodyly furste of alle othyr' (p. 185), as Mirk's *Festial* does, Magdalene's first sighting is here part of a broader comment on her identity as a composite figure. That knowledge of her role as recipient of the protophany can be attributed to Ambrose might validate the account (according to medieval logic), but for a modern reader it creates a feeling of distance from the statement.

If the *Gilte Legende* provides a condensed account of the Resurrection, Bokenham's *vita* provides a distinctly detailed description of the episode. Following the account in the Gospel of John, the narrator relates how Magdalene had:

[348] These ideas are made more explicit in Pseudo-Rabanus Maurus' Latin *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* (dated to the late twelfth century). In its representation of the account from John, Jesus comments that Magdalene does 'not believe that [he is] equal to God the Father'. On hearing this, Magdalene '[doubts] no longer' and believes that 'she [sees] Christ, the Son of God, who [is] truly God' (p. 72).
[349] See 1 Corinthians 15. 3: 'The chief message I handed on to you, as it was handed on to me, was that Christ, as the scriptures had foretold, died for our sins'.

> […] þat specyal grace
> That fyrst of alle owre lord she seye,
> Apperyng, as hym [Christ] had lyst to pleye,
> In þe lyknesse of a gardenere;
> But whan he seyd 'Marya', she knew hys chere.
> (ll. 5712-6).

While the text introduces the idea of Magdalene's doubt (the inclusion of the phrase '[b]ut whan he seyd […]' makes it clear that this figure did not recognize Christ at first), what is more interesting is that Magdalene is described as having 'specyal grace' (l. 5712). The use of the term 'grace', which meant primarily in Middle English, and still means in theological contexts, '[a]n exceptional favour granted by some one in authority, a privilege, a dispensation' and 'a mark of divine favour', is particularly significant.[350] Conveying the idea that she was given a privilege which was special, marking her out as an individual, it corresponds with the Lukan depiction of the (divinely-ordained) special commendation given to the Virgin Mary, a figure described as 'full of grace' and 'blessed […] among women' (Luke 1. 28).

Bokenham makes it quite explicit that the first appearance to Magdalene is no mere coincidence, but should be interpreted as a reward for her great loyalty to 'hyr loue' (l. 5709). The account stresses that she refused to forsake her Saviour 'whan oþir wentyn a-weye' (l. 5711) and that is the reason for her special sighting. In this way, the Magdalene of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is not just represented as having seen the risen Lord first (a conceptualization that can be found in the *Festial* and *Gilte Legende*), but is explicitly described as having been granted a special privilege, and is praised for showing unfaltering devotion.

[350] 'Grace, *n*' (meanings 8b and 8d) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013]. While 'a mark of divine favour' is the sense recorded in 1523, the earlier sense could be found circa 1400. The *Middle English Dictionary* also records as one of the senses of 'grace' a 'special token of God's favour, miracle, charism; a supernatural gift or power' (meaning 1c). See Kuhn (ed.) and Reidy (associate ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: G-H* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1963), pp. 283-8, p. 283.

2. The Significance of the First Witness

Leaving aside for a moment the hagiographical representations of Magdalene as First Witness, this section will focus on the overarching issue of religious authority. It discusses the different reasons given by writers for Peter's position of primacy in the institutional Church and shows how questions about the first sighting are inextricably linked with broader debates about spiritual leadership.

Although these specific questions are part of modern, rather than medieval, debate, the material is important to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century hagiographical texts (which represent Mary Magdalene as First Witness, but yet also represent Peter as primary spiritual leader). It should be noted from the outset that the three hagiographical texts never explicitly challenge the basis for Peter's role as religious hierarch and certainly do not criticize his authority in any way. Nevertheless, the hagiographies, and especially Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, seem to invite related questions about spiritual leadership (questions that are addressed, in a variety of different contexts, in twentieth-century theological studies).

In his entry for 'Pope' in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1907-12, G. H. Joyce argued that the 'proof that Christ constituted St. Peter head of His Church is founded in the two famous Petrine texts, Matt, xvi, 17-19 and John, xxi, 15-17'.[351] The passage from Matthew describes how Peter, having recognized Jesus as Christ, is told:

> Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jona; it is not flesh and blood, it is my father in heaven that has revealed this to thee. And I tell thee this in my turn, that thou art Peter, and it is upon this rock that I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [Translation of Latin Vulgate text].

[351] G. H. Joyce, 'Pope', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: an international work of reference on the constitution, doctrine, discipline, and history of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (London: Caxton Publishing, 1907-1912), XII. 260-75, p. 261.

Joyce states that a promise that Christ will 'confer on Peter supreme power to govern the Church' is given validation in the Johannine passage.[352] Here, and after the Resurrection, the evangelist relates:

> And when they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, dost thou care for me more than these others? Yes, Lord, he told him, thou knowest well that I love thee. And he said to him, Feed my lambs. And again, a second time, he asked him, Simon son of John, dost thou care for me? Yes, Lord, he told him, thou knowest well that I love thee. He said to him, Tend my shearlings. Then he asked him a third question, Simon, son of John, dost thou love me? Peter was deeply moved when he was asked a third time, Dost thou love me? and said to him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou canst tell that I love thee. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. [Translation of Latin Vulgate text].

In addition to these passages, some twentieth-century writers and theologians sought to locate additional authority for Peter's leadership of the Church in his role as First Witness to the Resurrection. In 1953, in a chapter discussing the apostles, Hans von Campenhausen, the Protestant theologian and Church historian, writes:

> Peter acquired his most vital significance primarily as a witness of the risen Christ, and in this capacity […] originally took precedence even over the Twelve. Peter was the first to whom Jesus appeared after his Resurrection. This tradition is not only explicitly recorded by Paul, but the resurrection narratives in the Gospels also still show traces of it, so that it must in fact be in accord with the original historical state of affairs. This means that it was with Peter that the Easter faith in the risen Christ began, and therefore the history of the Christian Church as a whole.[353]

Campenhausen's words firmly connect Peter's role as First Witness with his important role in the formation of the Christian Church. Though the passage does not explicitly state that being the first person to see the resurrected Christ is synonymous with having a claim to primacy, it does suggest that the first Easter witness can be considered the founder of Christianity.

Pagels, who contests Campenhausen's claim on the basis that some biblical evidence presents Mary Magdalene as having received the first sighting, develops further some of the different elements outlined above. After acknowledging that both Mark and John present Magdalene as First Witness, Pagels states that:

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[352] Joyce, 'Pope', p. 261.
[353] Hans von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1969 [1953]), pp. 17-18.

> [O]rthodox churches that trace their origin to Peter developed the tradition – sustained to this day among Catholic and some Protestant churches – that Peter had been the 'first witness of the resurrection', and hence the rightful leader of the church. As early as the second century, Christians realized the potential political consequences of having 'seen the risen Lord': in Jerusalem, where James, Jesus' brother, successfully rivaled Peter's authority, one tradition maintained that James, not Peter (and certainly not Mary Magdalene) was the 'first witness of the resurrection'.[354]

Pagels' comments here are important since she makes explicit the association between being first to see the risen Lord and being first in the sense of being leader of the Church. Her argument elaborates Campenhausen's (she says more strongly that Peter was considered 'rightful leader of the church' because he was 'the "first witness of the resurrection"') while also challenging his interpretation of the gospels. Though Peter's religious authority has not always been linked directly to his role as recipient of the protophany (the tradition found in Corinthians and Luke-Acts), some twentieth-century scholars have certainly understood Peter's primacy as being related to his first sighting. In his 1998 study William Thomas Kessler says that there was a 'gathering consensus' among German Protestant writers in the early twentieth century that the 'appearance to Peter was the first' and 'had a very great significance in the development of his role in the early church'.[355] Oscar Cullman, writing in 1952, agreed that this role was important, stating that '[it is clear that he to whom had been given the dignity of being *first* witness of [Christ's resurrection] was regarded, just because of this chronological preferment, as the one especially commissioned by Christ to hand on this witness. Accordingly, even this first appearance of Jesus, which has sufficient documentary proof, would suffice to give the foundation for the authoritative position of Peter as the leader of the Church.[356] Over forty years later, the Dominican J. M. Tillard argued that:

> [t]he 'privilege' of the *first* appearance of the risen Lord to the apostles had the effect of ripening Peter's faith and so of transforming the place which he held in

[354] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 39.
[355] Kessler, *Peter as the First Witness*, p. 107.
[356] Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple*, p. 63.

> the ministry of Jesus into an authentic primacy.[357]

Though Tillard does not argue that Peter's first sighting is the basis for his religious authority (and his analysis emphasizes the importance of the other apostles), he suggests that being recipient of the protophany is a contributory factor for Peter's pre-eminence in the early Church.[358] Indeed, while Tillard argues that 'Peter's "confession" in Matthew 16.13-23 has, in the Western tradition, been the passage most often cited to account for the earliest Christian community's belief in Peter's primacy' (Christ gives Peter the keys to loose and bind immediately after this confession), he later adds that 'Peter's priority in meeting the risen Christ stitches together […] his place in the apostolic group during the years of the ministry of Jesus and his rank in the Easter community'.[359]

Peter's potential identity as First Witness, then, has been perceived by some writers as a major contributing factor to his religious authority – and the authority of the Church's structure ever since. As Haskins argues in her 1993 study of Mary Magdalene:

> [i]t was the supposed fact of being first witness of the resurrection, according to 1 Cor. 15: 3-8, Luke 24: 34, and Acts 2: 32; 3: 15, which allowed Peter to claim his succession to Christ, and which was to justify subsequent male apostolic succession in the Church.[360]

If later hierarchs of the Church (and, as Pagels has argued, the Pope especially) derive their authority from this first appearance to Peter, there is clearly a great deal at stake in the First Witness question[361]

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[357] J. M. R. Tillard, *Bishop of Rome*, trans. John de Satgé (London: SPCK, 1983), p. 113. It is worth noting here that Tillard mentions earlier that '[t]he New Testament insists on the fact that Peter was first *among the apostles* (my emphasis) to see the risen one (1 Cor 15.5, Luke 24. 34). The Fourth Gospel's account of that other disciple arriving first at the tomb but standing aside while Peter went in first makes the same point'. Tillard, *Bishop of Rome*, p. 112**.** I make this point because at this moment in the text Tillard only seems to be saying that Peter is perceived to be the first *of the Twelve* to witness the Resurrection (see my earlier comments on the issue of firstness and first-firstness).

[358] See Tillard, *Bishop of Rome*, p. 115: 'First (*protos*) but not unique! The other apostles are similar to [Peter] in everything except in holding the first place. If he is the rock, they too are the foundation (Eph. 2. 20) [….]'.

[359] Tillard, *Bishop of Rome*, pp. 106-7 and pp. 112-3.

[360] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 88.

[361] See Pagels: '[F]or nearly 2, 000 years, orthodox Christians have accepted the view that the apostles alone held definitive religious authority, and that their only legitimate heirs are priests and bishops, who trace their ordination back to that same apostolic succession. Even today the pope traces his – and the primacy he claims over the rest – to Peter himself, "first of the apostles", since he was "first witness of the resurrection"'. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 41.

However, the accounts of the Resurrection in Mark, Matthew and John do not confer the role of First Witness upon Peter at all – but upon Magdalene. Jane Schaberg has pointed out some arguments used by scholars to account for the tradition of privileging the accounts in Luke-Acts and Corinthians over the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and John:

> Because Mary Magdalene is not mentioned in the list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15, many critics argue that the tradition that she did receive one is late, an insertion into the tradition of males, a kind of bridge between the empty tomb narrative and these accounts. Some argue that the traditions of a protophany to her (John 20: 11-18; Matt 28: 1, 9-10; Markan Appendix 16: 9-11 are late and historically worthless: John 20 is said to be a special tradition from the Johannine community with no historical nucleus; Matthew 28 derives from a concern, late in the history of the tradition, to combine the tomb tradition (in which the women have their fixed place) with the appearance tradition; the Markan appendix is from the second century.[362]

Nor are theological debates about primacy – and interest in the figures of Peter and Magdalene – necessarily restricted to twentieth-century theology. As I discuss later in the chapter, the fourteenth-century *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*, a text composed in Alemannic German and also translated into Latin, shows that certain medieval texts were interested in related issues of spiritual authority. 'Sister Catherine', a woman and non-cleric whose spiritual knowledge substantively exceeds her male, clerical confessor's, criticizes Peter and the apostles for their lack of insight relating to Christ's identity as God the Son. This figure also describes Magdalene, who is Christ's lover and who receives union with God, as accomplishing more than the apostles in her preaching of Christianity. Though the text is neither solely complimentary in its discussion of Magdalene (she is not initially permitted to

[362] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 223. Kessler cites von Campenhausen as arguing in 'The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb' that 'later' attempts to present persons such as Mary Magdalene as 'there at the beginning and the subjects of the first resurrection experiences' (thereby taking the place 'where originally Peter was') are 'of no historical value, and so without interest to [his reader]'. Kessler, *Peter as the First Witness*, p. 61. Incidentally, Mary R. Thompson provides a possible counter-perspective on why the passage from Corinthians does not refer to Mary Magdalene or any other woman. Drawing on the work of Reginald Fuller, she argues that: 'Paul's concern was to publish and to proclaim, to announce openly that Christ had died, was buried, was raised, and had appeared. He was not concerned with details of how, when, or where. At another point in her study she makes the point that '[i]n all four accounts there is strong evidence of the place Mary of Magdala held in the early Church. She is leader of the women, she is the first to know of [the] resurrection and she is the primary bearer of resurrection witness to the 'eleven'''. Mary R. Thompson, *Mary of Magdala: What the Da Vinci Code Misses* (New York; Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2006 [1995]), p. 21 and p. 61.

touch Christ) nor critical of the male apostles (they too become illuminated once they are denied Christ's presence on earth), greater emphasis is placed on Peter's lack of *gnosis* and Magdalene's exemplary love, preaching and relationship with the Divine.

This section has considered some of the reasons for Peter's position of leadership in the early Church. And while the Petrine primacy controversy is not a specifically medieval debate (though that passage from Matthew 16, as discussed later, is given unusual treatment in the *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*), the question of Peter's first witness is relevant to an understanding of power relations in medieval Magdalene hagiography. Magdalene's potential to be understood as a counter-heroine is closely associated with her first sighting of the risen Christ.

3. The Religious Authority of Mary Magdalene

Pursuing the argument that Peter's role as leader in the early Christian Church might be predicated, at least in part, on the tradition of emphasizing his first sighting of the resurrected Christ, one implication of representing Magdalene as First Witness is that she can be interpreted as possessing a credible claim to spiritual authority.[363] Without wishing to overstate the association between being the recipient of the protophany and being the first leader of the Christian community, the point is that representations of Magdalene's first sighting might – in later centuries at least – carry these possible connotations or, as

[363] Compare Schaberg in her chapter 'Mary Magdalene as Successor to Jesus': 'But that she [Magdalene] alone is named as receiving the protophany in John 20 and the Markan Appendix may indicate [that] she is the source of the empty tomb tradition complete with its insight/revelation, that is, its interpretation. The threatening thought appears: that Mary Magdalene can be considered a – or the – founder of Christianity, if one wants to use such a term; and that she was ''a creator of the Christian belief in the resurrection,'' and has a better claim than Paul to the title ''the first great interpreter of Jesus'''. Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 303. These ideas have also recently been given treatment on the Channel Five documentary *Mary Magdalene – Saint or Sinner* (aired Wednesday 23 June 2010). In this hour-long television programme concentrating on the alternative Christianities theme, the discussion included consideration of why Magdalene disappears from the gospels after the Resurrection and whether her important role might have been intentionally suppressed by the early Church. One of the points raised was that Magdalene as the person to have seen and had a vision of the Lord might have had the most legitimate claim to having founded Christianity.

Sinfield would call them, 'conditions of plausibility'.[364] Even if Bokenham, Mirk and the author of the *Gilte Legende* were not explicitly aware of there being any correlation between being the first person to see Christ and being the person granted definitive religious authority, the First Witness issue is inherently problematic from a political perspective. After all, why else would the *Early South English Legendary*, the *South English Legendary* and the *Scottish Legendary* avoid discussing the events of Easter (and thus the issue of the protophany), an episode which is arguably fundamental in the *vitae* of Mary Magdalene and is presumably key to her being recognised in hagiographical accounts as a saint? The account of the Resurrection inevitably raises questions, both when late-medieval writers of hagiography choose to include the tradition of Magdalene's first sighting and when they avoid commenting on the issue at all. There is clearly far more at stake than the chronological order of the appearances to Peter and Magdalene.[365]

Whatever their explicit awareness of the importance of the protophany and / or the different historical traditions about which follower saw Jesus first, Peter or Magdalene, there are what look like signs, in the texts, of awareness of the potential in the Magdalene story for a depiction of a quasi-apostolic, or even, in Bokenham's legend, an apostolic, dignity and authority being bestowed on a woman. In view of the fact that the First Witness question is linked to broader questions about primacy and pre-eminence, it is significant that in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* particularly we see an emphasis on Magdalene's special status

[364] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 47.
[365] The question of chronological order is actually considered unimportant by some writers. As Schaberg writes in relation to the debate over the protophany, 'Peter, says O'Collins, has the primary role as official proclaimer of the resurrection; in that sense Peter's witness is primary, even if it might not be temporally prior. No tension or conflict between primacy traditions is recognized'. Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 223.

in the Easter events.[366] Bokenham's account does not only imply that Magdalene was witness to the Resurrection, and that she was witness before Peter, but that she was given a special commission by Christ. Using direct speech, which emphasizes the sense of a direct commission from God, the narrator describes how the resurrected Christ

> […] seyd, 'Marye, þe not appalle;
> And go sey Petyr & my dyscyplys alle
> That I am up rysyn, as þou doost se,
> And shal beforn hem goon in-to Galyle.'
> (ll. 5720-4).

Although the commissioning scene does not occur in the *Festial* or the *Gilte Legende* (raising the important question of whether the authors of those texts mean to suggest that Christ appeared to the disciples without the assistance of Magdalene or whether they wish to play down the significance of the appearances to the male disciples), the *North English Legendary*, like the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, describes how Christ made:

> […] hir messangere
> Vnto al his appostels dere,
> And bad hir tell to lerd and leude
> His rising – þus kindnes he scheude.
> (ll. 71-4).

These two texts differ in their focus and the *North English Legendary* does not represent Christ as telling Magdalene that he would appear in Galilee to the group known as the 'appostols dere' (l. 72).[367] Nonetheless, both texts mesh with the representation in the Latin *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* (John account) of how Christ

[366] Karen Elizabeth Gross has also discussed the importance of medieval representations of Magdalene's special relationship with Christ, but in the context of a broader exploration of parallels between Pseudo-Origen's *De Maria Magdalena* (which Chaucer claimed to have translated) and other work by Chaucer. In her article 'Chaucer, Mary Magdalene, and the Consolation of Love', Gross writes: 'Mary Magdalene was understood as having a uniquely close relationship with Jesus, one well-rewarded with special favor at his resurrection. As Prudence in *Melibee* points out in her exoneration of women as counselors, ''for the grete bountee that is in wommen, oure Lord Jhesu Crist, whan he was risen fro deeth to lyve, appeered rather to a womman than to his Apostles'' (VII 1075)'. See Karen Elizabeth Gross, 'Chaucer, Mary Magdalene and the Consolation of Love', *The Chaucer Review* 14:1 (2006), 1-37 (3).

[367] The author of the *North English Legendary* says that Christ appeared first to Magdalene in order to 'mak hir in hir trouth be stabill, / To trow it fast with-outen fabill' (ll. 69-70).

called on Magdalene to '[g]o to [his] brothers' and to provide them with a special message (p. 73).[368]

While the *North English Legendary* seems to differentiate Magdalene from Christ's 'appostols dere' (l. 72) – presumably the Twelve – Magdalene might herself be classed as an apostle, even, as the title of Brock's study suggests, the *first apostle*.[369] In her important study of apostolicity, Brock differentiates between Pauline and Lukan definitions of 'apostle' and shows how questions about Magdalene's apostolic status are hinged upon the exact definition being used. To explain further: Brock argues that while Paul uses the term in a relatively broad sense (the original Greek word, according to Haskins, 'signified one who had witnessed and had been sent to preach the Word'), the Lukan author in the 'first chapter of Acts adds some new elements to the requirements for being an apostle': namely, that 'a person [has] to [have been] there "from the beginning" – one who accompanied Jesus from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up to heaven'; that the person must have experienced a resurrection appearance within forty days; and, according to Acts 1.21, that the person must be a male.[370] Paul, of course, had not been there from the beginning, perhaps helping to explain his less rigid definition of apostleship. Although Bokenham's Magdalene clearly cannot be read as an apostle in the more restrictive Lukan

[368] In this account, pseudo-Rabanus writes: 'At last the Saviour was convinced that the love he had before taken such pleasure in had never ceased to burn in the breast of his first servant and special friend, and he knew (he from whom no secret is hidden) that he had ascended to the Father in the heart of his perfume-maker. Just as before he had made her the evangelist of his resurrection, so now he made her the apostle of his ascension to the apostles – a worthy recompense of grace and glory, the first and greatest honor, and a reward commensurate with all her services. And he said to her: "Go to my brothers and say to them: '''The Lord says this: 'I ascend to my Father through nature and yours through grace; to my God, under whom as a man I am, and to your God before whom I am the mediator for you.'''' (pp. 72-3).

[369] See Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*. Pseudo-Rabanus explicitly refers to the 'apostolate of Mary' (p. 75) and refers to the privilege that she had in 'announc[ing] the resurrection for the first time to her *fellow apostles*' (p. 75, my emphasis). Although it is possible that David Mycoff's translation might be a little liberal (he acknowledges in his introduction that he uses 'the words ''prophet'' rather than ''prophetess'', and ''apostle'' rather than ''apostoless'' even when the Latin uses a feminine form'), Magdalene's apostolic authority is certainly emphasized in this account. See Mycoff, 'Introduction', p. 22.

[370] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 87. See Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, pp. 149-151 (p. 149). Brock, who always considers why, as well as how, a text operates, argues that '[a]s a work of persuasive literature, Luke-Acts achieves a particular objective by concentrating apostolic authority into the hands of only certain followers of Jesus, called the ''twelve''. […] In Luke-Acts this close connection between Jesus and the ''twelve'' qualifies them as the only proper and trustworthy witnesses of the resurrection and also insures that it is precisely their version of the whole life and teachings of Christ that is the correct one'. See pp. 152-3.

sense, she is given the job of becoming Christ's delegate when she alone is represented as recipient of the first resurrection appearance and first divine commission. While the *Gilte Legende* refers to the post-Resurrection Magdalene as a 'felawe to the aposteles' (p. 470) – a term that probably means friend and quasi-equal companion to the Twelve, yet feels somewhat cautious – Bokenham's Magdalene is, in the Pauline sense, the first apostle.[371]

The Magdalene of Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is not only represented as an apostle (in Paul's sense of the term), but has the potential to be understood as the apostle to the apostles. Although Haskins, in her discussion of this identity, draws on Raymond E. Brown to argue that some traditions saw Magdalene as no more than a '"quasi-apostle"' (a figure who brought the Good News to the male disciples, but not to the rest of the world), Bokenham's Magdalene is given a commission to tell Christ's disciples that he is 'up rysyn' (l. 5722) and is later shown to deliver this message to the unbelievers in Marseilles.[372] In her role as the apostle to the apostles, she has the responsibility of telling 'Petyr & [Christ's] dyscyplys alle' that Jesus has conquered death and thereby fulfilled the role of a dying and rising god (l. 5721).[373] Though the representation of Magdalene telling this group takes place offstage – in fact the text neither makes it explicit that she did perform this special role nor represents the moment in which Christ appears in Galilee to the men (though it is later implied that he did appear to the men) – other medieval texts choose to present this moment. N-Town's *The Appearance to Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1468) dramatizes Magdalene's joy at telling Peter and '[her] bretheryn' that 'I sawe oure Lord Cryst' and the late-thirteenth-century *Northern Passion* describes how Magdalene appeared to the disciples, saying:

> Mi Lord […] and […] yhours in fere

[371] Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham and Anne Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *A Chaucer Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 55.
[372] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 88.
[373] Ki Longfellow's *The Secret Magdalene* (2005) and Clysta Kinstler's *Mary Magdalene, Beloved Disciple* (2005 [1989]) are two examples of recent novels that incorporate treatment of Christ (Yeshua) in relation to the 'dying and rising god' theme. Marina Warner has briefly discussed 'parallels between pagan and Christian mythology', alluding to the body of work by figures like Sir James Frazer on 'the Christian atonement as the last version of the ancient sacrifice of the fertility god', see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 206-9 (p. 208).

Es resen, I wate with-outen were;
I saw my-self his woundes wete
And him quyke walkand on his fete.[374]

The hagiographical texts might be felt to point towards Magdalene's position of primacy (in the sense of being 'first in order, rank, importance or authority') in the pre-Ascension narrative.[375] As well as representing this figure as recipient of the protophany and, according to the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, the figure commissioned by Christ to tell the disciples about the central mystery of Christianity, Bokenham describes her elsewhere as Christ's closest follower (the person with whom he was '[c]onioynyd', l. 5683, in 'syngulere amour', l. 5685). Although the text employs the language of love to describe the special relationship between Magdalene and Christ, it represents this relationship as conferring dignity and the right to perform certain functions on behalf of the Lord, in addition to giving Magdalene what looks like the status of an apostle herself.

There is a shared interest in Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and some of the gnostic gospels with Magdalene's pre-eminence among Christ's followers. Just as the gnostic gospels, discussed in chapter one, emphasize the special regard in which Christ held Magdalene, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* also represents this figure as first in Christ's eyes. While there is not a direct relationship between these texts (Bokenham, as far as we know, could not have been familiar with the gnostic gospels), there are certain similarities in the representations of the special dignity awarded ('Mary') Magdalene. For example, similarities can be drawn between Bokenham's wording (he describes Magdalene as '[p]ryuylegyd', l. 5727, with 'synguler chershyng', l. 5728, before and after the Resurrection)

[374] N-Town, *The Appearance to Mary Magdalene* in *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, ed. Stephen Spector, EETS S.S. 11(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I. 365-9, l. 80 and l. 88, and Wilhelm Heuser and Frances A. Foster (eds), *The Northern Passion (Supplement)*, EETS O. S. 183 (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), ll. 3337-40.

[375] See 'Primacy, *n'* > *OED* (meaning 1a) [accessed 17 August 2013]. The Cistercian text *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* repeatedly uses words to describe Magdalene that conjure up an image of firstness-primacy: 'first servant [*premiceria*]' (p. 39), 'the first of his servants' (p. 55), 'favored with the first and the most privileged of his appearances' (p. 73), recipient of the 'first and greatest honor' (p. 73), the person to announce 'the resurrection for the first time' (p. 75), and 'the special friend of the Son of God and his first servant, the apostle to the apostles' (pp. 87-8).

and the *Pistis Sophia*, in which the Jesus figure says that 'Mary Magdalene and John, the virgin, will tower over all my disciples and over all men who shall receive the mysteries in the ineffable', and the *Gospel of Philip*, which argues that 'the companion of the [Savior] is Mary Magdalene. [But Christ loved] her more than [all] the disciples'.[376] Though some modern popular fiction imagines the relationship between Magdalene and Christ through the language of a romance novel, the conceptualization in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* of the kinship between the pair seems further evidence that Bokenham wishes to stress Magdalene's divinely-ordained special status, a status that builds upon her role as first apostolic witness and that could be translated into religious authority.[377]

Part Two: The Post-Ascension Narrative as Interrogative Narrative

1. From Resurrection to…Retraction?

In his Retraction to *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1390s), Chaucer asks that:

> Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retraccioun:/ as is the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; […]; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne.[378]

Having provided a collection of stories that include but is not limited to ostensibly secular, morally-questionable and sometimes pagan and apparently amoral narratives, the Retraction sounds the Pauline message that: 'oure book seith, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine," and that is myn entente'.[379] There seems to be an irreconcilable conflict between these words and much of the foregoing *Canterbury Tales.* While this reference to Chaucer

[376] *Pistis Sophia*, p. 193 and the *Gospel of Philip*, p. 138.
[377] See, for example, Fredriksson's *According to Mary Magdalene* (1997): 'The simple touch raced through [Mary Magdalene's] body, and her desire lit up in her eyes. She took [Jesus's] head between her hands, held it quite still, and kissed his mouth. And what had to happen happened; her desire lit his'. Fredrikkson, *According to Mary Magdalene*, p. 106.
[378] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Chaucer's Retraction', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 328.
[379] Chaucer, 'Chaucer's Retraction', p. 328. See 2 Timothy 3. 16: 'Everything in the scripture has been divinely inspired, and has its uses; to instruct us, to expose our errors, to correct our faults, to educate us in holy living'.

might seem out of place in a chapter about Magdalene legends and the issue of religious authority, the idea of a retraction is important in an examination of the conflicts between accounts of the authority given to Peter and Mary Magdalene. Though there is a strong argument for suggesting that in the late-medieval texts examined in this thesis Magdalene plays the principal role in the Resurrection narrative and is 'furste' (*Festial*, p. 185) in the sense of being pre-eminent among Christ's followers, this implied primacy seems to be retracted, or at least thrown into question, in the post-Ascension life. While Magdalene is described in post-Ascension accounts as preaching and providing religious instruction, the texts play down her earlier special significance.[380] There is a definite diminishing of her status as the figure held in 'superlatyue degre, / […]/ Both beforn & aftyr þe resurreccyoun' (*Legendys*, ll. 5593-5). It is possible to find in the narrative structures a second instance of containment.

Since Magdalene is conceptualized as the First Witness – and, according to the Bokenham text, the figure given a commission to tell 'Petyr & [the] dyscyplys' the news of the resurrection (l. 5721) – it is surprising, and seemingly incompatible, that in the post-Ascension narrative the writers suddenly represent Peter as presiding over Magdalene (and as being very much 'furste' in the sense of 'preceding all others, in dignity, rank, importance, or excellence').[381] Leaving aside for a moment the fact that Magdalene herself is described as calling Peter as 'oure maystyr' (*Legendys*, l. 5891), it is worth noting that the texts represent Peter, a character who barely features in the narrative before the Ascension, as having control over the teachings, dogma and organization of the Church. This sudden shift in authority becomes particularly explicit in the *Gilte Legende* and the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* when the writers describe how Peter placed Magdalene under the care (even the

[380] The next chapter will discuss some of the representations of Magdalene preaching in relation to a socio-economic reading of the texts.
[381] 'First' (*adj* (and *n2*) and *adv* > *OED* (meaning 4a) [accessed 17 August 2013]. The *Middle English Dictionary* also records the sense of 'most prominent in rank, power, or excellence' (see meaning 4a). Hans Kurath (ed.) and Kuhn (associate ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: E-F* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1952), pp. 587-91, p. 589.

possible supervision) of Bishop Maximin. Although the texts do not explicitly state that Magdalene's freedom is restricted by this action (compare the discussion in the last chapter of how the sinful Magdalene figure seems to be 'disciplined and punished' for her erstwhile autonomy), it is certainly noticeable that Peter here possesses control over Magdalene's actions. The description of how he had Magdalene '[c]ommyttyd' to Maximin (*Legendys*, l. 5757) emphasizes his position of dominance (perhaps as a result of the fact that 'commit' can have the meaning 'to give in charge, entrust, consign') and represents him as a figure of authority.[382]

Peter is not only shown as having greater authority, in this action with regard to Magdalene, but it is suggested that he has superior knowledge of Christ's teaching. As in Margaret George's recent novel, there is an arguable paradox in the fact that Magdalene is the 'first to see [Christ]' after he has risen from the dead (and thus Christ would appear to have 'favored [her] above all others'), but after Christ has ascended Peter is understood as the 'successor' to this figure.[383] This, however, is the point in time, in the events following Jesus' death, when following the Ascension, his (male) followers become the substitutes on earth for his authority. Acts 1. 8 relates that prior to being 'lifted up' into the cloud (1. 9), Christ told the 'Men of Galilee' (l. 11) that:

> the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will receive strength from him; you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, in Samaria, yes, and to the ends of the earth.

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[382] 'Commit' (*v*) > *OED* (meaning I) [accessed 17 August 2013]. This usage is recorded in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* circa 1386 and appears in an advisory speech given by Prudence to Melibee: 'Now, sire, thanne shul ye committee the kepyng of youre persone to youre trewe freendes that been approved and ynowe'. The *Middle English Dictionary*, citing the example from Bokenham, provides: 'to entrust (sb. to another), put under (someone's) protection'. See meaning b: Kurath (ed.) and Kuhn (associate ed.), *Middle English Dictionary: C.4* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960), pp. 433-4, p. 433.

[383] George, *Mary Called Magdalene*, p. 811 and p. 823. Although the Magdalene character in this novel denies rumours that being First Witness means that she is Christ's favourite, she is also keen to refute the claims of the 'Peter people' that 'unless Peter or one of his deputies visits a church and lays hands on the people, they can't be true Christians'. As she is represented as saying (in response to arguments that Christ's powers were bestowed upon Peter): '" I don't think Jesus designated a successor. He knew we were all unworthy – or all equally worthy"' (p. 823).

That Peter is presented as having superior knowledge of Christ's teachings is shown in the fact that he is responsible for the prince's edification. Although Magdalene is represented as providing the princess of Marseilles with a spiritual education, she is not considered qualified enough to teach the lady's husband about 'the lawe that [she preaches]' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472). The *Festial* states that 'þan schappode þis lorde to gone to Ierusalem to speke wyth Seynte Petur and wytte [know] wheþer it where sothe [truth] þat Magdaleyne prechud' (p. 186) and the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* describes how Magdalene responded to the question of whether she could 'defende […]/ The feyth wych [she teaches] so besyly' (ll. 5887-8) with the answer: 'Ya, þat I may […]/ Be dayly myraclys & by wytnesse I-wys/ Of oure maystyr Petyr, wych at Room is' (ll. 5889-91). Though the *Festial*'s Peter is not explicitly described as Magdalene's 'maystyr' (and it is relevant, particularly in light of later debates about the papacy, that he is not associated in that text with Rome), both accounts present Peter as the authority on the Word of God.[384] As the person considered most knowledgeable about Christ and his teachings, he possesses a position of pre-eminence once attributed to Magdalene.

What is particularly interesting in the Bokenham account is that Magdalene is only able to defend the events which she has first witnessed by having Peter validate her experience. The subversive potential of the legend seems to be neutralized, or at least diluted, with this image of containment. While Clopper has argued that Magdalene 'subordinates herself and her words to Saint Peter, who ''proves'' them' and Jansen has observed that 'though Mary

[384] The question of whether or not Peter was in Rome has attracted much attention in theological circles. Tillard states that '[t]radition became increasingly, if gradually, aware of the link between Peter's place among the apostles and that of the pastor of the church of Rome, centre of the communion of churches, within the college of bishops' and refers to how Tertullian 'early in the third century seems to have been the first to quote the confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16.16-19) as evidence for the Roman primacy, the *tu est Petrus*' . See Tillard, *Bishop of Rome*, p. 103. Cullmann's *Peter: Disciple* describes how the Waldensians had already raised the question in the Middle Ages as to whether Peter had any historical connection with Rome since 'the New Testament nowhere tells us that Peter came to the chief city of the Empire and stayed there' (pp. 71-2). At stake in these debates is the broader issue of 'whether the papal claim of power over the Christian Church [was] justified' (p. 70), for '[i]f indeed it could really be proved that Peter never set foot in Rome at all […], then of course the papal claim could not be *historically* justified at all; it would have to rest content with a purely dogmatic justification' (p. 71).

Magdalen may have preached and converted pagan souls, nonetheless she bowed to Rome and Saint Peter when it came to explicating the intricacies of the faith', both critics focus on this episode in relation to the *Legenda aurea*.[385] As a result, neither comments on the choice of words in the Bokenham account and particularly the use of 'wytnesse' there (l. 5890). Though the term is seemingly employed to refer to the testimony or evidence of Peter (Magdalene is suggesting that Peter can back up the ideas which she has been preaching), it is an interesting choice of phrasing under the circumstances. Indeed, while the text later implies that the disciples had a sighting of the risen Christ, it only represents the moment in which Magdalene is made witness and does not say anything about an individual or special appearance to Peter. A similar puzzle exists in the *Gilte Legende*, when Magdalene tells the prince that she can defend her preaching because she is 'confermed [strengthened] euery day by miracles and by the predicacion [preaching / sermon] of oure maister Seint Petre' (p. 472).[386] Having been first to see the risen Lord, it is not clear why Magdalene's faith should be sustained through the address of an apparently less enlightened follower.[387]

There is a marked contrast in the spiritual hierarchy, or how it is represented, before and after the Ascension (an event which is not represented in the *Gilte Legende*, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* or *Festial*, but had been included in Pseudo-Rabanus' *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*).[388] While the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* makes one single reference to Peter before the Post-Ascension narrative, the fact that he is not

[385] Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, p. 242 and Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 189.
[386] See 'conferme(n' (meaning 1) and 'predicacion' in Douglas *et al* (ed.), *A Chaucer Glossary*, p. 26 and p. 112.
[387] Pagels puts forward an analogous case about the issues facing gnostic Christians in antiquity. As she notes: 'But the gnostic Christians, whom Irenaeus opposed, assumed that they had gone far beyond the apostles' original teaching. […]. And those who consider themselves "wiser than the apostles'' also consider themselves ''wiser than the priests''. For what the gnostics say about the apostles – and, in particular, about the Twelve – expresses their attitude towards the priests and bishops, who claim to stand in the orthodox apostolic succession.' Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 50.
[388] Pseudo-Rabanus relates that: 'just as [Magdalene] learned of the resurrection in the garden, so she witnessed the ascension on the mountain; just as she announced to the apostles the first event as soon as it had taken place, so she foretold to them the future ascension; and standing with the apostles at the ascension, as though pointing with her finger to the ascending host, she showed she was equal to John the Baptist in being more than a prophet' (p. 84).

mentioned at all in the other two texts points towards his implied insignificance. Clopper, commenting briefly on the *Legenda aurea*, has argued that:

> The modern reader is struck by the ways in which Mary is made subordinate to male figures in her own legend despite Jacobus's assertion that Jesus conferred such great graces and showed so many marks of love. Mary is 'entrusted' to Maximin; although she preaches, she subordinates herself and her words to Saint Peter, who 'proves' them; Mary preaches and converts, but Maximin and Lazarus are made bishops; we hear her angry words in the visions but not those of her message to the governors and others.[389]

While Clopper sees the advancement of Peter's status as part of a bigger picture in which Magdalene is 'made subordinate to male figures', I am not sure that the diminishing of Magdalene's special status is predicated on her sex alone.[390] Though I do not disagree with his reading, or at least in as far as it goes, there are other issues aside from the reassertion of patriarchal control at stake here.

2. The Conundrum of Religious Authority

Although the hagiographers do represent Magdalene as being subservient to Peter (there is certainly a sense that Magdalene's potentially troubling religious authority is contained), the texts do not *resolve* the conflicts over spiritual leadership in any straightforward or unproblematic way.[391] It is possible to invoke a convention or tradition in order to query it and although the texts represent Peter in a position of religious leadership, they never quite succeed in papering over the earlier conceptualizations of her as First Witness and, in the Bokenham account, Christ's special disciple. What is more, the literary critic does not have to read texts 'with the grain' or to accept what might be considered to be an unconvincing about-turn in the representation of power relations. Chapter one refers to a method of

[389] Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, p. 242.
[390] Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, p. 242. Clopper argues that because Jacobus is a 'Preaching Friar' he would want to 'play […] down' Magdalene's preaching and 'suggest ways in which it was authorized by males' (p. 242).
[391] As noted in the opening to this chapter, Jansen finds in the *Legenda aurea* a resolution in the treatment of conflicts over spiritual authority: 'The later Middle Ages, then, resolved the Peter-Magdalen tension by acknowledging Mary Magdalen's apostolic mission, but yoked it to her humble submission to Peter'. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 189-90.

deconstructive reading which brings to the fore those textual ideas which are introduced and then never quite erased. And pursuing a dissident analysis, the reader might also question why, for example, the Magdalene of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* needs Peter to defend the 'feyth wych [she teaches] so besyly' (l. 5888) when a prayer from her to God is enough to grant the childless prince and princess an 'eyr' (l. 5898). Since the prince is 'dysposyd fully for to beleue' once his wife becomes pregnant (l. 5907), why is it still necessary for Peter to 'preue' 'Maryis doctrine' (l. 5909)? Has the doctrine not already been proven through the miracle?[392]

Although the texts never say that Magdalene's identity as First Witness and first apostle should correlate with her status as head of the primitive Church, there are a number of apparent paradoxes in the hagiographers' sudden assertion, or reassertion, of Peter's dominance post Resurrection. In the same way that Chaucer's Retraction, or indeed the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1380s), might be felt to be intentionally unconvincing (the reader has to decide how far to trust the change in narrative perspective at this point), the unexpected shift in the representation of hegemonic relations, married with the silence over why Peter is suddenly able to assert authority over Magdalene, remains a conundrum in the narratives.[393] Below, and in the spirit of dissident reading, I shall take apart the texts to show why the conceptualizations of Peter as 'maister' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472) are so problematic, before moving on to argue that the 'Peter-Magdalen tension' remains distinctly unresolved. Nor are these the sort of readings restricted to modern feminist writers and theologians; as I discuss later in the chapter, certain late-medieval readers and audiences might also have chosen to reanimate some of the questions coming out of the texts.

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[392] See Clopper on the more positive set of representations found in the Digby play: 'Although Peter baptizes the king and instructs him in the faith, Peter does not act as the proof of what Mary has taught. The whole question of whether Mary is telling the truth is elided. Furthermore, the king's conversion is brought about as a result of Mary's confrontation with the idol after she has preached a sermon. She is the active agent'. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*, p. 245.

[393] See Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 473-585.

The issue of why Magdalene is suddenly placed in 'humble submission to Peter' is never accounted for in the texts.[394] Though it could be argued that the hagiographers do not need to explain the reason for Peter's usurpation of power (they represent him as taking up a position of singular dominance in the early Church because it was known from the gospels that he held a position of authority in the early Church, an authority located in that passage from Matthew 16), this seems a relatively weak argument. If the hagiographers wished to confirm or legitimate Peter's special status and to resolve the tension existing in the texts as a result of the representations of the Magdalene's firstness or apparent pre-eminence, it is odd that they would place such little emphasis on his significance in their accounts of the lifetime of Christ. While reference is made to '*Petyr* & [the] dyscyplys' in Bokenham's description of Magdalene's commission (l. 5721, my emphasis), this single reference need not point towards Peter's implied importance in the pre-Ascension narrative. Indeed, though Cullmann includes the fact that the angel in Mark 16. 7 says '"Go and tell his [Christ's] disciples *and* Peter that (Jesus) goes before you to Galilee"' as an argument for Peter's 'unique position within the position of disciples', the decision to distinguish Peter by name can be interpreted differently in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*.[395] By making direct reference to Peter, the text, advertently or inadvertently, draws attention to the fact that he is not the first witness of the Resurrection (as well as perhaps suggesting his authority over the other disciples).

In addition to playing down Peter's importance before the Post-Ascension account, the texts also understate the role of the Twelve. Whereas the *Early South English Legendary* describes how Christ was in the house of Simon the Leper with 'Is deciples tweolve'(l. 81), the accounts of the pre-Ascension life in the *Festial*, *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* do not explicitly refer to Magdalene as existing outside a chosen inner circle of

[394] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 190.
[395] Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple*, p. 25 and p. 23.

Twelve.[396] While the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* says, for example, that Magdalene 'mynystyrd hym & hys in þere nede' (l. 5505), glossed by the editor as 'Mary follows and ministers to Christ and His disciples', and there is a later reference to how Christ's disciples forsook him when he was 'cruelly naylyd up-on a tre' (l. 5690), Magdalene is not represented as lesser to these male disciples.[397]

Bokenham in fact places emphasis on the 'syngulerte / of loue' (ll. 5584-5) that Christ had for Martha, Magdalene and Lazarus and the fact that '[t]o spekyn aftyr degrees of comparysoun, / Mary [Magdalene] stood in þe superlatyue degre' (ll. 5592-3). What is more, although the allusion in the Resurrection scene to 'Petyr & [Christ's] dyscyplys alle' (l. 5721) most likely refers to the Twelve, the use of the word 'alle' could be inferred as meaning that Magdalene is given a commissioning to tell *the whole body* of followers – or the 'seuenty dyscyplys & two' (l. 5754) – about Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The most obvious case for arguing that the texts diminish Peter's significance before the Post-Ascension narrative is that they never represent Christ as appearing to this figure or providing him with a commission (they also never describe Magdalene as telling Peter that he will receive a sighting of the resurrected Christ, an omission which admittedly impacts on Magdalene's identity as apostle to the apostles).[398] The texts do suggest, though almost as an afterthought, that Peter and the disciples saw the risen Christ: the *Gilte Legende* and *Festial* describe how Peter showed the prince the place of Jesus' Ascension, and this suggests that he

[396] Pseudo-Rabanus also refers to how Jesus attended the house of Simon the Leper with 'the twelve apostles' (p. 54). Though it is possible to argue that the allusions in the *Gilte Legende* to the post-Resurrection but pre-Ascension Magdalene as 'felawe to the aposteles' (p. 470) could be interpreted as referring to (and also differentiating her from) the Twelve, understandings of who these 'aposteles' constitute depends on the definition being employed.

[397] That Magdalene remains by the cross after the male disciples flee is particularly significant given the role of loyalty in medieval culture's sense of what virtue means. Indeed, medieval antifeminist tradition often emphasized the fact that the women disciples remained faithful when the male disciples fled. For an account of the 'great devotion and unfailing love these women showed', see Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, p. 203.

[398] Clopper, drawing on Susan Haskins' discussion of apostolicity, notes the implication of this omission in the Digby play: 'Although Mary Magdalene and one of the other Marys say that they will report their findings to the disciples, we do not actually have the scene of the report, as we do in N-Town, for example. The omission is significant since it is Mary's report to the disciples that earns her the title of *apostola apostolorum*'. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, p. 243.

was present when Christ ascended to God. Further, in Bokenham's account of Peter's instruction of the prince, the narrator says:

> He hym led & shewyd hym euere place
> Wher cryst prechyd & suffryd & roos ageyn,
> And wher of hys dycyplys he was last seyn.
> (ll. 6036-8).

Though it is not absolutely explicit that the text is referring to the place where Christ was 'last seyn' after he rose from the dead (l. 6038), the fact that the princess later acknowledges that her husband saw where Christ 'deyid & roos & *hens dede pace*' (l. 6119, my emphasis) points towards this meaning.

In her description of the elevation of Peter and the eleven (the Twelve excluding Judas) to the role of leaders of early Christianity, Pagels argues that:

> The orthodox noted the account in Matthew, which tells how the resurrected Christ announced to 'the eleven' that his own authority now has reached cosmic proportions: 'All authority, on heaven and earth, has been given to me'. Then he delegated that authority to the 'eleven disciples'.[399]

Though the texts allow for the fact that certain disciples might have seen the risen Christ and could possibly have received a commission which gave them authority as a group, it makes no reference to Peter having received a special appearance (an appearance in which he might have been granted authority over all other followers and given the charge to 'Feed [Christ's] sheep').[400] That the texts, and particularly the *Gilte Legende* and the *Festial*, play down the importance of an appearance to the male disciples, coupled with the fact that Peter's encounter with the resurrected Christ is never given representation, seems to imply an intentional diminishing of Peter's role on the part of the hagiographers. While the oversight might stem from the fact that they are recounting the legend of the life of Magdalene and not Peter, this argument seems unconvincing, given that the texts evidently *are* interested in Peter

[399] Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 40.
[400] See John 21.17. Pagels has also commented on this passage from John in relation to Peter's religious authority. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 39.

(why else would they bother to include this figure at all?). There is simply little to suggest Peter's position of primacy in the Pre-Ascension account.

3. Silences and the Seeds of Subversive Questioning

Although the hagiographers do not represent Magdalene as having a greater claim to religious authority than Peter and the Twelve (and certainly not in the post-Ascension narrative), the texts still open up the possibility for speculative 'suppose…' or 'what if…?' readings.

Speculation has become an important area in contemporary medieval studies. Robert Mills, whose interest in 'alternative histories of response' lends itself to speculation, contends that 'all histories involve a degree of speculation'.[401] Further, 2013 saw the publication of a study dedicated to speculative medievalisms. In 'Speculative Medievalisms: A Précis', the Petropunk Collective describe their project as bringing together 'medieval ideas of *speculatio*, the cultural-historical position of the medieval as site of humanistic speculation, and the speculative realists' "opening up" of "weird worlds" heretofore believed impenetrable by philosophy'.[402] Relevant to the discussion in this chapter, they make the point that:

> Speculation […] must be distinguished from practical guesswork or conjecture, and even more strongly from the kind of discourse that stays within the supposedly transparent definability of terms and facts. Speculation is, instead, the rigorous exploration of the potentialities of the perceivable, the very foundation and condition of experience and experiment […].[403]

This idea of probing the 'potentialities of the perceivable' shares parallels with the methodology employed in this chapter. Just as the Petropunk Collective emphasize the need for taking 'creative leaps' in thinking, this chapter develops to the fullest imaginative

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[401] Mills, *Suspended Animation*, p. 21.
[402] The Petropunk Collective [Eileen Joy, Anna Klosowska, Nicola Masciandaro, Michael O'Rourke], 'Speculative Medievalisms: A Précis', in *Speculative Medievalisms: Discography*, ed. The Petropunk Collective (Brooklyn, New York: Punctum Books, 2013), pp. i-ix, p. ix.
[403] The Petropunk Collective, 'Speculative Medievalisms', p. viii.

outcome some of the questions coming out of the medieval Magdalene texts.[404] It considers the implications of some of the representations found in the texts, even if these representations are later shut down or offset with more traditional images of Petrine, and indeed clerical / patriarchal, authority.

Pursuing the argument that sometimes introducing a possibility just to later contain it can be nearly as dangerous as making the claim outright, it is significant that Magdalene is initially and implicitly suggested to be first among Christ's followers.[405] The problem with raising, if not necessarily articulating, questions about theology and doctrine (in relation to narratives like these which present the primacy of a certain figure) is that it allows other, more difficult, questions to enter into the arena for discussion.

While there is certainly nothing heretical about representing Mary Magdalene as First Witness (the idea found in Matthew, John and Mark and many medieval texts), the point is that *if* the texts were to develop to the fullest possible conclusion the idea of Mary Magdalene as being the most distinguished among Christ's followers, they might simultaneously call into question Peter's authority and also the very *basis* for Peter's authority (an authority from which the Pope directly derives his position of pre-eminence and the bishops, priests, and deacons subordinate to him derive their authority).[406] Though the texts do not elaborate these readings, the fourteenth-century *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*, discussed in part three, combines comment on the limitations of clerical leadership with representation of women's

[404] The Petropunk Collective, 'Speculative Medievalisms', p. v.
[405] N-Town's *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* (ca.1468), for example, stages questioning of Mary's virginity. Although Mary is eventually proven to be '[w]ithowtyn fowle spotte or maculacion' (compare Bokenham's description of the sinful Magdalene as being 'defoulyd ful horrybylly' with 'spottys', l. 5451), the text still introduces the problematic question of how a virgin could conceive a child. N-Town, *The Trial of Mary and Joseph* in *The N-Town Play*, I. 139-52, l. 349.
[406] As well as the texts mentioned elsewhere in the chapter (the *Southern Passion*; Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*; the *City of Ladies*; the insertion in the Cotton manuscript of the *Cursor Mundi*), the fourteenth-century *Stanzaic Life of Christ* (which has been edited for EETS by Foster), presents Magdalene as recipient of the protophany. The reasons given for her 'first' (l. 7545) sighting are as followed: she 'lufd so tenderly' (l. 7552); Christ came to save 'sȳnful men' (l. 7556); 'comune wymmen' (l. 7558) who do penance for their sins 'passen wise men' (l. 7560); Eve's sins were remedied by Magdalene being 'ful of grace' (l. 7569); and because God desired grace where 'synne hade bien' (l. 7575). The text does, however, seem to contradict itself when it later adds the possibility that the Virgin might have had an even earlier sighting, but that this sighting has never been mentioned in the gospels since a mother cannot bear 'witnes' to her son (l. 7794).

exemplary spiritual authority ('Sister Catherine's' and Magdalene's): it presents explicitly some of the ideas that are only hinted at in the hagiographical narratives. If placed in this context, the *vitae* might contribute to a growing culture of heterodoxy in the late-medieval West, whether or not advertently. By raising the question of what it would mean for Magdalene to be recognised as 'maister' in the early Church, a term that the *Early South English Legendary* represents Martha and Lazarus as applying to Magdalene of the wilderness, the texts enable dissident readers and audiences to ask why she cannot be recognised in this role.[407] The hagiographies, in Gaunt's phrasing, do 'produce an ostensibly "straight" status quo' when they affirm Peter's position of authority. Yet, their representations of Magdalene's (later negated) *firstness* make 'visible that which they apparently wish to repress': Magdalene's potential, owing to her first witness, as a figure of spiritual authority (an authority with biblical precedence, as chapter one has shown).[408]

Developing the idea that the texts, and especially the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, invite the question of what it would mean for Magdalene to be recognized as pre-eminent in the primitive Church, it is helpful to look in more detail at their accounts of the spiritual education of the princess. Although the hagiographers retract their earlier representations of Magdalene as commanding a position of implied primacy, they never explain their reasons for depriving her of this special status. And although it has been argued above that the representation of the prince's education by Peter is puzzling, it should be noted that the princess receives a thorough spiritual education with Magdalene as her guide. Though the

[407] *Early South English Legendary*, l. 602. In her explanatory notes on the *Early South English Legendary*, Sherry Reames states that 'in this context, the phrase could mean that they [Martha and Lazarus] are acknowledging her as their leader, their spiritual guide and instructor, their model, and/or their superior in knowledge, skill, or courage. It is a dramatic moment in the text, since the term *maister* was rarely applied in a positive sense to a woman'. This reference to Magdalene as 'maister' is interesting in the light of the discussion in the previous chapter on the disciplining of gender, but also because the word is so suggestive. Indeed, the *Middle English Dictionary* provides the meaning of: 'A spiritual director, religious instructor' or 'the leader of a religious or philosophical movement; also in Biblical use: translating rabbi' (meanings 4a and b). See Reames, 'Explanatory Notes to Early South English Legendary Life of Mary Magdalene', pp. 80-9, pp. 86-7 and Kuhn (ed.) and Reidy (assistant ed.) *Middle English Dictionary*: M-N (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1975), pp. 37-43, p. 41.

[408] Gaunt, 'Straight Minds / "Queer" Wishes', p. 167.

texts do not specify whether Magdalene is as familiar with Christ's teachings as Peter, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* suggests that she was present when Christ was teaching and preaching. When relating that Magdalene ministered to Christ, reference is made to 'lukys gospel' (l. 5506), and this account identifies Mary Magdalene as one of the women who followed Christ the itinerant preacher.[409] She is also described as having sat at Christ's feet to listen to his teaching. In a passage modelled on the Mary of Bethany material, Bokenham's Christ tells Martha that Magdalene has chosen to 'lestyn [to] my lore, / Wych neuere shal fayle' (ll. 5566-7).

The representations of the princess' spiritual education suggest Magdalene's competence in facilitating religious knowledge. The *Gilte Legende*, after describing the prince's encounter with the wife he assumed dead, relates that:

> [T]he moder respired and saide right as though she hadde awaked from an harde slepe: 'Blessed Mari Mauudeleine, how thou art of gret merite and glorious in the sight of God, for in al my gret sorugh of my trauaile of childe thou were to me a mydwiff, and in al my necessytees thou hast benignely serued me.' And whanne the pilgrime herde this thinge he meruayled hym and sayde: 'Lyuest thou, my right dere wyff?' To whom she saide: 'Ye, suerly I lyue and am right now come from the pilgrimage that ye come fro, and right as the blessed Seint Peter ledde þe aboute Ierusalem and shewed the alle the places wher oure Lord suffered dethe and was beried and many other places, I was withe you, and Mari Mauudeleyn was my felaw and my leder, and I seigh alle the places there and haue hem well in my minde'. And thanne [she tolde pleinly] alle the places and alle the myracles that her hus|bonde hadde sene and went neuer oute of the way in none article (p. 475).

The princess in the *Gilte Legende* describes seeing 'alle the places' shown to the prince (p. 475); the lady in the *Festial* tells her husband that 'as Seynte Petur hath ladde þe abowton, so hath Mary Magdaleyne ladde me þe same gate' (p. 187); and the princess in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* refers to having gone on the 'sam pylgrimage' (ll. 6115) as her husband. Though it must be acknowledged that Bokenham's princess fails 'in no poynt *substancyally*' when she tells her husband about what he has seen (l. 6126, my emphasis), a qualifier that

[409] See Luke 8. 1-3 on how Mary Magdalene and other women of means ministered to Christ when he was 'preaching and spreading the good news of God's kingdom' (8.1).

suggests that she might fail in some points marginally, the *Gilte Legende*'s Magdalene might be regarded as being as good a spiritual 'leder' – note the term used – as Peter.[410] That the princess 'went neuer oute of the way in none article' (p. 475) could be understood as a sign of the excellent education that she has received from Magdalene, though it might simply suggest her ability to memorize the events of her husband's pilgrimage.[411] Just as the *Gilte Legende* earlier praises Magdalene's proficiency as a preacher, relating that 'it was no wonder' that the 'mouth that so debonairly and so goodly had kussed the fete of oure Lorde were more enspired with the worde of Godde thanne other' (p. 471), the text points towards Magdalene's aptitude as a spiritual guide. In view of the recent hypothesis that the *Gilte Legende* might have been composed by a woman, Dame Eleanor Hull, it is interesting that the pro-woman representation of Magdalene's teaching (or, at least, facilitation of knowledge pertaining to the life of Christ) is manifested in this account.[412] While Magdalene is not explicitly described as having taught the princess, she guides the princess on the same pilgrimage as Peter guides the prince. Since the prince is said to have been 'wel *taught* of Seint Petre in the faithe' (p. 474, my emphasis), during his time in Jerusalem, it is possible to understand Magdalene as playing a similar role in educating the princess.

By allowing for the possibility that Magdalene might be as good a spiritual 'leder' as Peter, the texts contribute implicitly to one of the central lines of argument made by feminist

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[410] Findon has commented briefly that it is possible to find in the Digby play's version of the scene a 'subtle undermining of St Peter's power' since although the Digby Magdalene 'obeys church orthodoxy by not baptizing her converts herself but sending them to St Peter in Jerusalem', 'she and the Queen of Marseilles seem ultimately to evade the patriarch's complete control'. According to Findon, the queen's line "I am baptysyd…be Marvys gyddavns /Of seynt Petyrys holy hand' suggests that Peter is 'almost an afterthought'. Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 179.

[411] The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* appears to suggest that the lady was able to recall in detail what her husband had seen (rather than what she was taught by Magdalene): 'And anoon to rehersyn she began / Hyr husbondys iourne euene by & by, / And what þe seyde & where & whan / And faylyd in no poynt substancyally' (ll. 6123-6). Though this description seems to play down Magdalene's role in facilitating spiritual knowledge, the princess does tell her husband earlier that: 'So blyssyd Mawdelyn of hir good grace / Wyth yow me led & shewyd yche deel, / Wych in my mende I prendyd ['apprehended'] weel' (ll. 6120-3). This reference to being led, and shown the different places of pilgrimage, by Magdalene attributes her a more substantive role than simply companion.

[412] See Hamer, 'Introduction', III. 51-6. Further information about suggested authorship is provided in chapter one of this thesis.

theologians and writers today: that there is no rational reason for the downgrading of Magdalene's special status, a downgrading that not only occurs in the hagiographical accounts, but, as Haskins has shown, finds parallels in the demotion of women's spiritual roles and responsibilities in and after the third century.[413] Though Magdalene's and Peter's spiritual authority is represented differently (it is unclear if the princess' education takes place in a vision since Magdalene is still in Marseilles when the couple return), certain parallels can be drawn with some ideas coming out of the texts and the more powerfully-expressed arguments in the late fourteenth century that women should be permitted to preach and be priests.[414] Reading 'with the grain', it might be argued that the hagiographers' Magdalene is depicted as being as good a spiritual 'leder' for women as Peter is for men. Nevertheless, developing the ideas in the episode to their fullest possible conclusions, the texts can be understood as subtly suggesting Magdalene's credentials for institutional 'leder'-ship (a role perhaps prohibited to women as a result of the Judaic inheritance of male rabbis).[415]

A dissident reading of the texts uncovers several questions about what it would mean for Magdalene to be recognized as an authority figure in the Church, an achieved status predicated on her special significance as First Witness and, by implication in the Bokenham text, first apostle. Though the hagiographers certainly never go as far as modern feminist mythologers in their gentle probing of the religious authority question (in Rosemary Radford Ruether's modern feminist 're-visioning' of the Resurrection narrative, Magdalene is told that

[413] See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, pp. 88-9, on the 'gradual depression of women's status' in which women were 'no longer able to preach and baptise' and where it became 'more common for holy women to minister to other women than to the general community'. As mentioned in chapter one, Michèle Roberts stages debate over these themes in *The Secret Gospel of Mary Magdalene* (2007 [1984]). In this novel, the Magdalene character, who wishes to teach and preach alongside the male disciples, says to Peter: 'Although I was the first to see the risen Lord, I do not claim that gives me any authority over those of you who did not share my vision. Yet because I believe in the Word of Jesus, because he lives in me, and because I have gone through baptism and resurrection in my soul, I desire to become a priest and to baptise others as you brethren will do. Surely *all* of us should become priests' (p. 130).

[414] As I discuss later in the chapter, Lollard Walter Brut provides a number of arguments for women's greater participation in the Church.

[415] It is relevant that Peter is even described as praising Magdalene. When the prince arrives to see Peter, he is told: '"Pees be withe thee. Thou art welcome for thou haste leued good counsayle' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 474).

she is 'now the continuing presence of Christ' and that it 'is for [her] to continue the redemption of the world'), they might be felt to query the very constructions of Peter's pre-eminent authority that they invoke.[416] This implicit questioning is given more overt, though different, treatment when considered in view of the closing lines of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*. When Bokenham makes reference to the 'gloryous apostolesse, wych aboue þe skye/ Crownyd art in blysse in þe heuenely regyoun' (ll. 6305-6), an image that corresponds with conceptualizations such as those found in the *Quatrefoil of Love* (ca. 1340-60) of the Virgin Mary as 'qwen of heuen', he represents Magdalene as an almost celestial authority figure.[417] At this moment in the text, the question of spiritual authority on earth becomes almost immaterial, for Magdalene is imagined as a divine sovereign, a holy monarch who is able to 'gouern & gye' her 'seruauntys' as a second Mary (l. 6307).[418] She is not only senior to the religious hierarchs on earth, but is almost represented as having achieved theosis.

The analysis above raises the question of why the texts might allow for the relegation of Peter's authority (even if they ostensibly consolidate this authority). And though there is not a straightforward answer to this query, the legends certainly seem to reflect, even help

[416] Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Kenosis of the Father: A Feminist Midrash on the Gospel in Three Acts', *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), pp. 1-11, p. 8. Sinfield makes the related point that 'any utterance is bounded by the other utterances that the language makes possible. Its shape is the correlative of theirs: as with the duck / rabbit drawing, when you see the duck the rabbit lurks round its edges, constituting an alternative that may spring into visibility. Any position supposes its intrinsic *op*-position'. Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 47.

[417] Sir Israel Gollancz and Magdalene M. Weale (eds), *The Quatrefoil of Love*, EETS O. S. 195 (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), l. 312. A considerable amount of work has been done on representations of the medieval Magdalene's association with the Virgin. See, for instance, Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints*, pp. 171-9; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 286-306; and Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 177.

[418] This idea of Magdalene as being represented in monarchical terms is, however, also interesting in light of Pagels' argument that in the early Christian Church the 'bishop was emerging, for the first time, as a monarch (literally "sole ruler"). Increasingly, he claimed the power to act as disciplinarian and judge over those he called "the laity"'. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, p. 65.

constitute, a cultural moment characterized by subversive religious questioning.[419] Part three, below, describes some of the ways in which figures including Lollard Walter Brut (fl. 1390-1402) and 'Sister Catherine' employed the Magdalene at the service of women and non-clerics. In a reciprocal vein, the *Festial, Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and *Gilte Legende* might be indirectly influenced by some of the anti-institutional Church discourses in contemporary circulation (not least by arguments like Brut's that women should be permitted greater spiritual authority).

While I do not mean to suggest that the narratives advance Lollard causes or that the criticisms of Peter in the "*Sister Catherine*" *Treatise* are mirrored in the hagiographical accounts, the representations of Magdalene's first witness, coupled with the implicit interrogation of the basis for Peter's leadership, might align the texts with more heterodox traditions of religion and power. In a late-medieval period marked by anxieties about heresy and dissent, the representations of Mary Magdalene's public preaching alone have subversive potential. Though these images have a long history, the point is that they are being reproduced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when figures like Brut, Margery Kempe and 'Sister Catherine' were looking to Magdalene hagiography and hagiographical traditions to help find justification for pro-women and / or anti-clerical arguments.[420] Situating what Robert Mills calls a 'reparatively positioned audience – an audience attuned to the queer wishes mediated by cultural texts' – allows for an understanding of the texts' subversive

[419] Winstead has also referred to the fact that the hagiographical texts, and specifically the virgin martyr legends composed between 1250 and 1400, were 'products of an increasingly restless society' but were also 'part of the environment fostering that restlessness'. In other words, medieval saints' lives could simultaneously evoke and assist in constructing the *zeitgeist.* Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, p. 111.

[420] The *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*, for example, uses the tradition of Magdalene's time in the wilderness (an episode which is discussed in the next chapter) to provide a potential anti-clerical statement. 'Sister Catherine' is represented as telling her confessor: 'Many people say, "I will gladly love and obey my confessor!" But [I ask you]: Who heard [Magdalene's] confession? Whom did she obey? Who gave her God's body?' The confessor correctly answers 'God!' Similarly in this treatise, 'Sister Catherine' is able to circumvent clerical authority by achieving a direct relationship with the Divine. Although the treatise does not explicitly criticize the figure of the confessor (he is represented in a favourable light), 'Sister Catherine' greatly surpasses him in knowledge of esoteric Christianity and acts as his teacher and spiritual guide. Elvira Borgstädt (trans.), *The ''Sister Catherine'' Treatise*, in *Meister Eckhart: teacher and preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn with the collaboration of Frank Tobin and Borgstädt, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 349-87, p. 374.

potential.[421] Though the texts do contain the representations of Magdalene's implied *firstness* (or potential authority based on her identity as First Witness), they create spaces from which dissident questions about religion and power might be generated.

Part Three: *'Cui bono?'*

1. The 'Minding the Gaps' Approach to (Investigating) Ideology

Referring to the fact that Shakespeare's female characters often 'fall silent at the moments when their speech could only undermine the play's attempts at ideological coherence', Alan Sinfield, in *Faultlines*, goes on to say that:

> [w]e may think of such movements as manifesting a strategic deployment of perfunctory closure: like the law-and-order finale of the cops-and-robbers movie, they are conventially required but scarcely detract from the illicit excitement of the bulk of the text.[422]

The crux of Sinfield's argument is that '[these movements] are the price that has to be paid for the more adventurous representation, and because an audience knows this, it may discount them'.[423] As he argues earlier, readers and audiences do not have to 'respect closures' but can insist instead that 'the middle of […] a text arouses expectations that exceed' the ending.[424] Although the point is not identical, a comparison might be drawn with Pierre Macherey's 1966 contention in his *Theory of Literary Production*, a seminal text for approaches like Sinfield's, that:

> [t]he order which [the text] professes is merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter in the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth.[425]

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[421] Mills, '"Whatever you do is a delight to me!"', p. 3.
[422] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 73 and pp. 73-4.
[423] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 74.
[424] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 48.
[425] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 155.

Both Sinfield and Macherey suggest, in different ways, that literary constructions of resolution might be (intentionally or unintentionally) artificial, providing only a cursory solution to the disorderliness of the text.[426]

In my reading of the hagiographical accounts of spiritual leadership I would not go as far as Sinfield does in this analysis of female silences in Shakespeare and suggest that the reader is actively encouraged to 'discount' the representations of Peter as a figure of religious authority or to view these narrative depictions as merely 'perfunctory'.[427] Nonetheless, what I am arguing is that conceptualizations of spiritual authority in the Post-Ascension account, conceptualizations that are conventional since they emphasize the authority of the Prince of the Apostles, might operate as the necessary antithesis to the potentially 'more adventurous' representations found in the descriptions of Mary Magdalene's pre-Ascension life (particularly those in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*).[428] Since contemporaneous heretical groups including the Lollards advocated women's participation in the priesthood and espoused anti-papal sentiments, it is likely that the hagiographers would need to dampen down, or at least counterbalance, the subversive potential found in the representations of Magdalene's spiritual authority (even if as a requisite or partially requisite measure).[429] The

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[426] Sinfield notes in fact that his discussion of Shakespeare's silent female characters could be read in terms of Macherey's work. He writes: 'Alternatively, as Dympna Callaghan suggests, we may relate the disallowing of women's voices in these plays to Pierre Macherey's analytical model, wherein the point at which the text falls silent is recognized as the point at which its ideological project is disclosed. What may be discerned there is both necessary and necessarily absent; it may be figured as the "unconscious" of the text. In this view, the gaps in the character continuity I have been considering represent not only the silencing of particular female characters; they also manifest breaking points of the text, moments at which its ideological project is under special strain'. Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 74.
[427] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 74 and p. 73.
[428] Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 74.
[429] It does seem perplexing that Mirk, a cleric and conservative figure, would allow for the sort of dissident perspectives outlined above, but Jansen convincingly argues that medieval sermons 'could be, in [Mikhail] Bakhtin's terms, dialogical in that it is not just the institutional voice, or the preacher's voice, that is contained in them; frequently, if we listen carefully, the voice of the audience [which in the case of the *Festial* would include women and lay people] can be discerned'. See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 7. It should also be acknowleded that while Ford comments, in *John Mirk's Festial*, that the *Festial* was once believed to have been 'composed as an anti-Lollard work', this notion 'has been dismissed by scholars' (p. 143). Ford's own contention, and indeed one of the conclusions to her study, is that although 'Mirk's approach was not a heavy-handed condemnation of Lollardy or rebellion' (p. 150), 'his writing of the *Festial* was motivated by a desire to dissuade the masses from Lollardy and revolt by providing an avenue of vernacularity, lay agency, and participatory ecclesiology within the orthodox church' (p. 143).

representation of Peter as commanding a position of authority over Magdalene presents an attempt to neutralize the more potentially combustive elements found in the texts.

Though hagiographical images of Magdalene as First Witness and, in the Bokenham text, first apostle are neither heretical nor even extraordinary in so far as they go, these images have dissident potential, even if it is not developed in the texts. It is worth pointing out here that just because dissidence is undeveloped does not mean that it is impotent or unrealized. I referred in chapter one to the queer work of Simon Gaunt in medieval studies. Gaunt acknowledges the way that '"queer" readers can locate "queer" wishes, made visible as they are repudiated by narrators who simultaneously enact and disavow them'.[430] Medieval Magdalene hagiography also creates a space for 'queer' (in the sense of counter-hegemonic) readers and audiences who might choose to resurrect some of the ideas that its authors ostensibly suppress. And like Macherey (and New Testament scholar Carla Ricci, who performs an '*exegesis of the silence*' with regard to the roles of Mary Magdalene and the women of Luke 8. 1-3 who followed Christ), this chapter reads between the lines to consider what the texts might not be willing or able to say fully.[431] While this practice involves a certain degree of appropriation or co-option, textual interpretation is always a political act.

This deconstructive method of reading is supplemented when the texts are considered through the lens of more explicitly dissident literature on the theme. Whereas late-medieval Magdalene hagiography raises but notably suppresses or contains certain questions about what it might mean for Magdalene to be recognized as a figure of spiritual authority (a counter-heroine in the field of theology), the fourteenth-century German "*Sister Catherine" Treatise* [*Schwester Katrei*] is more boldly explicit about Magdalene's exemplarity and is, at several points, outwardly critical of Peter and the apostles.

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[430] Gaunt, 'Straight Minds / "Queer" Wishes', p. 167.
[431] See Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women who Followed Jesus*, trans. Paul Burns (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 23. Macherey argues: 'We should question the work as to what it does not and cannot say, in those silences for which it has been made. The concealed order of the work is less significant than its real *determinate* disorder (its disarray)'. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 155.

In this mystical text once associated with Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1327), the figure of 'Sister Catherine' is represented as telling her father, the confessor, that Magdalene 'did everything the apostles did in a perfect life' and that she 'accomplished more in a shorter time than any of the apostles'.[432] While Magdalene, who 'was wanting' when she first tried to touch Christ, is described as having been made 'more perfect' when she was later permitted to touch the foot of the resurrected Christ ('[h]ere Mary experienced her eternal salvation for the first time'), the text is less complimentary in its commentary on Matthew 16. 14-16.[433] Unlike in orthodox tradition, the passage is not interpreted as contributing to understandings of Peter's primacy. When Christ asks Peter 'What do you say about me, about who I am?', the fact that Peter says 'you are Christ, Son of the living God' is taken as evidence that 'Peter did not recognize that the great God was within the person of our Lord Jesus Christ' and that he 'lacked […] insight'.[434] As Barbara Newman notes, the "*Sister Catherine" Treatise* presents 'the superior attainments of a woman', Mary Magdalene, over Peter and the male disciples (even if, in the spirit of retractions, the apostles are only 'temporarily shamed', since the 'beguine unexpectedly turns to reach for an orthodox conclusion' by suggesting that 'the disciples too ''became strong in the Holy Spirit'' and acquired the same grace that Mary Magdalene received').[435] Perhaps because of the text's association with the Free Spirit movement, a heretical movement based on 'autotheism and liberation from the institutional Church', 'Sister Catherine' presents Magdalene as equal, and, in some ways and at some moments, superior, to Peter and the Twelve.[436]

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[432] *The ''Sister Catherine'' Treatise*, p. 380.
[433] *The ''Sister Catherine'' Treatise*, pp. 372, 373.
[434] *The ''Sister Catherine'' Treatise*, p. 376. Peter should have said: 'I am the son of the living God!' The treatise, in fact, provides eight examples of Peter and / or other disciples (such as Bartholomew and Philip) failing to understand that Christ is God the Son. See pp. 376-8 (p. 376).
[435] Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 176. My reading here is informed by Newman's analysis. See pp. 175-6 or more detailed discussion of the issues including the idea that '[u]nlike Mary Magdalene, who turned from her desire for Christ's physical presence to inward union with the Divine, Peter and the disciples constantly fell short, for they failed to recognize the Father in the Son' (p. 175).
[436] Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 180. Newman notes that the Free Spirits endorsed the 'elevation of the freelance Mary Magdalene above the hierarch Peter' (p. 180).

The implications of the hagiographers' treatment of the religious authority theme are given consideration below. As in the sixth-century sermon of Gregory of Antioch (the patriarch from 571-93), in which the resurrected Christ is described as saying: 'Be the first teachers of the teachers. / Let Peter, who has denied me, learn/ that I can also ordain women to be apostles', I shall argue that the texts if developed to their fullest plausible conclusion might provide a case for women being permitted equal stature in institutional Christianity.[437] In their representations of Magdalene as First Witness, preacher, and spiritual guide, the narratives seem to contribute to arguments such as Walter Brut's (1391) that 'woman is capable of priestly power' and that she is 'able to exercise whatever spiritual power a man can'.[438] Brut in fact makes reference to the legend that a woman, a prostitute called Joan, did once hold supreme authority in the Church of Rome and that she performed the duties befitting a Pope (including performing ordination). Had the legend of Joan's papacy had factual basis, it would clearly be problematic for medieval male clerics, since if all Joan's 'acts [were] void and groundless' because she was a woman, then the issue would emerge as to whether 'popes and priests now [were] validly ordained and whether they [were able to] administer sacraments.' [439]

The final section concentrates on women's, and thereby non-licenced, preaching and teaching. It also considers issues of apostolic succession and legitimacy of rule.

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[437] See Gregory of Antioch, 'Sermon on the Bearers of Ointment', in de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, pp. 157-69, p. 168. Esther de Boer, in her introduction to this text, comments that in Eastern Orthodox tradition Magdalene is recognized as '"equal to the apostles"' (p. 156).

[438] C. W. Marx (trans.), 'On whether women are suitable ministers to consecrate the sacrament of the Eucharist', in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires, with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 255-7, p. 256 and p. 257.

[439] Alcuin Blamires (trans.), *The Register of Bishop Trefnant*, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Blamires, pp. 257-60, p. 259. The editorial note makes reference to a story from around the thirteenth century that 'a woman in male disguise had held papal office for over two years before dying suddenly after giving birth to a child during a liturgical procession' (p. 259).

2. Medieval Women and the Question of Spiritual Authority

On the most basic and least contestable level, the representation of Magdalene's special relationship with Christ, a relationship that is confirmed in the hagiographical accounts when she is made first witness and, in the Bokenham account, apostle to the apostles, might be felt to provide medieval women with a model of spiritual authority that could be emulated.

The Book of Margery Kempe provides a literary account of a medieval woman modelling her spiritual relationship with Christ in part on Magdalene's special bond with Jesus.[440] The text describes how Margery, imaged as a non-virginal *sponsa Christi*, has a vision that Christ, described elsewhere as the 'trewe lover' of Magdalene, tells her: 'I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar'.[441] *The "Sister Catherine" Treatise* corresponds with *The Book of Margery Kempe* in representing a special affinity between Christ and Magdalene: Jesus is referred to as Magdalene's 'lover', a term can be understood in the spiritual sense, and the unusual argument is made that Magdalene must have been 'a pure maiden' since Christ would not 'have been so intimate with her' had she not been 'a pure human being'.[442] Though not a central aspect of her

[440] Coletti and Liz Herbert McAvoy are two of many critics who explore Margery's association with Magdalene. While Coletti is not only interested in Margery's imitation of Magdalene (she makes the point that 'Kempe does not simply […] model herself after Mary Magdalene's example as preeminent lover of Christ'), she acknowledges that '[t]he similarities between the lives of the biblical and legendary saint and the fifteenth-century bourgeois holy women are so numerous and Margery's identifications with Mary Magdalene so specific that Susan Eberly has argued that Kempe directly modeled [sic] her own contradictory hagiographical aspirations upon the life of the saint'. See Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, pp. 80-4 (p. 80) and Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, Studies in Medieval Mysticism (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 116-30 and pp. 186-8. A reading of Kempe's *Book of Margery Kempe* shows some of the ways in which Margery might be likened to Magdalene: Margery displays 'pride' (p. 24); she is described as showing 'mech velany' (p. 24); Christ is said to have 'kallyd hir fro the pride and vanyté of the wretthyd world' (p. 25); Margery exhibits 'grett bodyly penawnce' (p. 25); Margery is 'slawnderyd and reprevyd of mech pepul' (p. 27); she is identified by her 'plentyuows teerys' (p. 27); Margery is 'temptyd wyth the syn of letchory' (p. 28); she is accused of having 'sum evyl spyrit' in her body (p. 51); Margery acknowledges her sin and is forgiven since 'of unworthy [Christ makes] worthy' (p. 59); she experiences important 'revelacyons' (p. 19); Margery has a vision of the Resurrection where she stands in the 'same place [where] Mary Mawdelyn stode' (p. 81); and she is associated with 'contemplacyon and holy meditacyon' (p. 141).

[441] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 167 and p. 92.

[442] *The "Sister Catherine" Treatise*, pp. 381, 380.

imitatio, 'Sister Catherine', who models herself on Magdalene, also calls Jesus '[her] beloved' (a term which Magdalene is described as having applied to Christ).[443]

The representation of a special relationship between Margery and Christ, one that mirrors the special affinity between Jesus and Magdalene, could be felt to bestow on Margery a potentially counter-hegemonic form of spiritual authority. In a well-known scene from the text, Margery stands up to the Archbishop of York, a secular authority on earth, and a justification for her confrontational behaviour might lie in the fact that she receives wisdom directly from Christ.[444] The question of whether that has given her the right to behave in certain respects like an ordained man, in teaching the people and, even, in reproving sin clearly arises in the text and in the minds of those clerics who examine her. As well as refusing to agree not to 'techyn ne chalengyn the pepil in [his] diocyse', Margery confronts the Archbishop when she says: 'Ser, so I her seyn that ye arn a wikkyd man'.[445] Although not entirely explicit in the account, the reader might take the implication that since Margery is privy to divine knowledge she need not subordinate herself to a male, ecclesiastical intercessor.

One logical implication of mysticism, a religious culture that emphasizes personal spiritual wisdom or enlightenment over received knowledge, is that there is less need for a clerical intermediary. Indeed, in the *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*, the confessor's daughter, who claims that God is 'with [her] spiritually without interruption', tells the confessor:

> [i]f you and other clerics had not prevented me, I would have spent my time more virtuously than I have done. I thought that everything the clerics preach is

[443] *The "Sister Catherine" Treatise*, p. 354 and p. 372. Newman has noted a number of ways in which Magdalene provides a model for 'Sister Catherine'. She argues that Magdalene's 'preaching, her voluntary exile, and finally her deification provide the exemplar for Sister Catherine's life'. See Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 175.
[444] See, for example, Margery's question to Christ: '"Jhesu, what schal I thynke?"'. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 32.
[445] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 126 and p. 125.

gospel![446]

The consequence of women experiencing a special relationship with the Divine, a relationship that finds parallels in Bokenham's account of Magdalene's special relationship with Christ during his time on earth, seems to be that they are able to move outside the boundaries of clerical control and even appear to claim for themselves some of the privileges and authority possessed by clerics. If Margery, particularly, understands herself as the spiritual companion of Christ, there seems little basis for her accepting subordination to ecclesiastical authorities.

While medieval women might be able to emulate Magdalene's special bond with Christ, perhaps enabling them to circumvent male ecclesiastical structures in the process, there is more at stake than the possibility of women experiencing a direct, unmediated relationship with the Divine. What seems more important is a consideration of the political implications of conceptualizations of Magdalene as recipient of the protophany with regard to the issue of women and institutional spiritual leadership.

While there is certainly a difference between arguing that the texts represent Magdalene as First Witness and arguing that they imply that medieval women should be permitted equal stature in the Church, the representation of Magdalene as recipient of the 'specyal grace' (*Legendys*, l. 5712) of the protophany could raise the question as to why medieval women are

[446] *The "Sister Catherine" Treatise*, p. 353 and p. 352. Coletti provides an interesting discussion of anti-clericalism in the Digby account of the aftermath of the Resurrection. Having discussed the passage in the play in which Christ, having raised Lazarus from the dead, says that '[t]he joye þat is in Jherusasallem heuenly,/ Can nevyr be compylyd by covnnyng of clerke', Coletti writes that: 'Divine recognition of the inadequacy of clerical ''covnnyng'' recurs in a wholly original post-Resurrection scene in which the heavens open to disclose Jesus preparing to send Mary Magdalene an angelic dispatch ordering her apostolic mission to Marseilles. He prefaces his charge to the angels with a two-stanza encomium to his mother (1349-63). […]. Concluding this densely allegorical passage with a telling variation on the inexpressibility topos, Jesus asserts: ''The goodnesse of my mothere no tong can expresse, / Nere no clerke of hyre, hyre joys can wryth'' (1364-65).' See Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, pp. 121-2.

excluded from full participation in organised Christianity.[447] If, as Haskins' analysis suggests, '[i]t was the supposed fact of being first witness of the resurrection […] which allowed Peter to claim his succession to Christ' and which enabled a succession of male religious hierarchs, the conceptualizations of Magdalene as the first person to have seen the resurrected Christ might call into question the very basis for this gendered difference in status.[448]

Certainly, as a reading of the *City of Ladies* (1405) shows, some medieval writers did employ the argument that Christ's 'resurrection […was] announced first by a woman' when he 'appeared to her first on Easter day' at the service of women (Christine here aims to discredit one specific attack on women by antifeminists: the tradition that presented women's speech as 'unreliable and worthless').[449] Likewise, it is possible to find in the hagiographical representations of Magdalene as First Witness evidence of women's important roles as followers of Christ.

If interpreted from a 'wishful' perspective (for example, by figures like Margery Kempe or Walter Brut), the texts might contribute to the case for women's greater participation in the medieval Church.[450] Though the legends, as sites of conflict and contradiction, do make it explicit that Magdalene is subordinate to Peter, they also allow for more subversive readings and interpretations of spiritual authority. When Bokenham presents Magdalene as an important disciple and 'holy apostelesse' (l. 6301), he also challenges the

[447] From the opposite angle, Esther de Boer's study *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up* shows some of the ways in which the early Christian church orders 'limit the role of women with a reference to Mary Magdalene and the other women disciples' (p. 117). The third-century *Instructions of the Apostles*, for example, suggests that since the Lord God only sent the Twelve to 'instruct the people and the Gentiles' (p. 116) – even though 'there were with [the men] women disciples [including] Mary Magdalene' (p. 116) – women and particularly widows should not teach (p. 116). Similarly, the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* backs up the idea that women should just 'pray and listen to the teachers' (p. 117) because Christ 'nowhere sent out women to preach, although he did not lack women' including Mary Magdalene (p. 117). Although these texts restrict women's roles as teachers, the *Instructions of the Apostles* does allow for women becoming deacons and anointing other women since 'our Lord and Saviour also was ministered to by women ministers [including] Mary Magdalene' (p. 116). Esther de Boer, discussing this passage, notes, '[c]ompared to the later church tradition, in which only male deacons were allowed, an ordained woman is revolutionary. However, in both the prohibition against teaching and the permission to be ordained, to anoint and be the soul and the mind of the bishop, the background is conservative: Mary Magdalene is used to preserve the cultural boundaries between males and females' (p. 119).

[448] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 88.

[449] Christine de Pizan, *City of Ladies*, p. 27.

[450] Mills, '"Whatever you do is a delight to me!"', p. 4.

justification on the prohibition on institutional roles for women in preaching and teaching, ministering the sacraments, and forgiving sinners on behalf of Christ – the chief, privileged, roles granted to the (male) clergy. Given that a woman, Magdalene, who had been a follower of Jesus and was, in Bokenham's words, given 'þat specyal grace' (l. 5712) of experiencing first the central mystery of Christianity, Christ's resurrection from the dead, and was given a special commission to bring the Good News to 'Petyr & [the] dyscyplys' (l. 5721), what is the basis for women's subservience in the institutional Church? If she was a 'holy apostel[esse]' and, according to the three texts examined in the thesis, also preached and assisted in the conversion of non-Christians, how is she conceived as different from the male apostles? Why, consequently, should medieval women be prohibited from all priestly roles and submit to the successors of Peter (who serve as 'maystyr[s]', *Legendys*, l. 5891, in the Church) when Magdalene was the recipient of 'synguler chershyng' by Christ (l. 5728)? Although distinctions must be drawn between some ideas coming out of Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and Brut's unequivocal statement that 'gender is not a qualification for the priesthood', Bokenham, perhaps because he is writing for a largely female readership (including influential women patrons), seems to allow for this suggestion.[451]

In light of medieval Christian understandings of the different spiritual paths open to men and women, it is possible to argue that Magdalene might only function as a model for a different type of holy followership reserved for women in the Church: women's personal, and thereby possibly mystical, relationships with the Divine, rather than serving as a model for a

[451] 'On whether women are suitable ministers', in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Blamires, p. 257.

counter-institutional authority that privileges female experience.[452] Nevertheless, and as it has been suggested above, a dissident reading of Magdalene's first witness and preaching would make it possible to offer approaches that lead to the possibility of seizing upon the more subversive, but never-quite-articulated, ideas coming out of these representations.

3. Religious Authority and Medieval Non-Clerics

Issues of primacy and spiritual leadership are not only important to questions about women and religious authority, but also to broader questions about the power of the clergy. Pursuing Macherey's argument that it is the work of the critic to 'identify the active presence of a conflict at [the] borders', this section will interrogate some of the more troubling ideas that are pushed to the edges in the narrative.[453] *If* the theory of apostolic succession is contingent on a belief that medieval religious hierarchs have, directly or indirectly, derived their authority from Peter's first sighting, the presentation of Magdalene as recipient of the protophany might call into question the legitimacy of the ecclesiastical authority figures of the day.

The three texts all conclude their accounts of Mary Magdalene's life with the conventional theologically orthodox and submissive image of her receiving 'the body of oure

[452] I say 'possibly mystical' because, unlike Magdalene, medieval women do not live in the age of Christ. They are not able to experience Jesus the man in the same way that Magdalene can and so the closest that they can come to emulating her relationship with Christ is through mystical encounters. In her 1995 reading of the Digby play, a reading that argues elsewhere that the Digby heroine's 'spiritual forte [is…] visionary and charismatic' and separate from 'male priestly power', Mimi Still Dixon writes: 'Excluded from Church hierarchy, from preaching, and from presiding over the miracle of communion, [medieval] women found voice and authority through personal encounters with God. According to Elizabeth Petroff, women found in visions a means to transform and affirm the self, to discover "the imprint of the divine in the innermost human soul"'. Mimi Still Dixon, '"Thys Body of Mary": "Femynyte" and "Inward Mythe" in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*', *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995), 221-44 (230 and p. 235).

[453] Machery, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 155.

Lord [the Eucharist] of the bisshop' Maximin (*Gilte Legende*, p. 478).[454] Perhaps especially unsurprisingly in the *Festial*, a sermon collection produced for clerics to preach, the texts close by outwardly emphasizing the importance of the bishop in facilitating Magdalene's last rites. Even so, and as this chapter has been suggesting, the texts seem to stack up different ideas and representations only to undercut the potentially 'more adventurous' depictions with a series of more acceptable or approved representations (while also adding further potentially subversive material, such as the images of Magdalene's preaching activities in Marseilles).[455] That the authors might have felt a need to reintroduce the bishop at this point in the narrative might be a sign of the hagiographers' awareness of the anti-ecclesiastical / anti-episcopal potential of certain representations found at other points in the texts (including maybe the Resurrection scene) and manifested more forcefully elsewhere.

Contemporaneous preachers from heterodox sects might find a model in the representations of Magdalene as a female, and thus unlicensed, preacher and spiritual guide. Scholarship on gender and heresy has been interested in the issue of women preachers. Margaret Aston, in the context of a discussion of whether Lollard women ever actually acted as priests (she concludes that the evidence is 'indefinite'), acknowledges that the Lollards 'produced some famous women preachers in their time'.[456] Joan White, the wife of William White, a Lollard priest who was burnt for heresy in 1428, might be considered one such example. John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563) relates that after her husband's execution,

[454] Coletti has discussed this issue in relation to the Digby play. Having explained some of the differences in nuance between representations of Magdalene's 'participation in the eucharistic sacrament' in the Digby play and what she calls the 'traditional vita', Coletti later interprets the Digby Magdalene as a 'figure whose reception of divinely authorized revelations and circumvention of clerical control of the Eucharist constitute channels of access to sacred power rivaling those of institutional religion'. Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, p. 132 and p. 134.

[455] See Sinfield, *Faultlines,* p. 74.

[456] Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, History Series; 22 (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), p. 69.

Joan, 'folowyng her husbandes fotesteppes according to her power, teachyng & sowyng abroade the same doctrine', 'confyrmed many men in Gods truthe'.[457]

Whether or not many medieval women Lollards actively engaged in preaching, (which overlaps and blurs with teaching, since both involve 'sowyng […] doctrine'), there is little denying either the importance of women in Lollard circles or the contemporaneous anxieties pertaining to medieval women preachers. The records for the Norwich heresy trials of 1428-31 document the cases of a number of women, including Margery Baxter (tried 1428-9), Isabel Davy of Toft (1429), Matilda Fleccher of Beccles (1430) and Hawisia Mone (1430).[458] Though being a female heretic is not the same as being a female preacher / teacher, the Norwich heresy trials are useful in showing the number of women coming under the attention of the authorities for their dissent from orthodox religious practice. Further, Claire Coss' discussion of women in Lollardy between 1380 and 1530, which draws examples from Foxe's martyrology, suggests that a number of women in Lollard circles did engage in teaching, if not preaching, activities (such as Allice Collins of Burford, who regularly recited 'at conventicles the ten commandments and the epistles of Peter and James').[459]

Even where women preaching may not have occurred in actuality, medieval women's teaching and preaching still attracted significant anxieties. Aston refers to Henry Knighton's

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[457] John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* or *TAMO* (Sheffield: HRI Online Publications, 2011), Book 3, p. 405. Available from: http//www.johnfoxe.org [accessed 18 August].

[458] See Norman P. Tanner (ed.), *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, Camden Fourth Series; v. 20 (London: Offices of the Royal History Society, 1977), pp. 41-51, pp. 64-6; pp. 130-3; and pp. 138-44. It is revealing to read the confession of Hawisia Mone. Although she does not refer to preaching, she alludes to having 'herd, conceyved, lerned, and reported' a long list of 'errours and heresies' (p. 140). These include the arguments that: 'confession shuld be maad oonly to God', p. 140); that 'temporal lordis and […] men may lefully take alle possessions […] from alle men of holy Churche and from alle bysshops and prelates […] and gyve thar good to pore puple' (p. 141), and that 'every man and woman beyng in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath [as] muche poar of God in al thynges as ony prest ordred, […] be he pope or bisshop' (p. 142). The comments on confession are relevant to the discussion in chapter one of this thesis, poverty and wealth to the discussion in chapter three, and ordination to the theme of this chapter.

[459] Claire Coss, '"Great Reasoners in Scripture": The Activities of Women Lollards, 1380-1530', in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1978), pp. 359-80, p. 371. Coss refers to Foxe's discussion of William and Joan White. For the account of Alice Colyns, listed in a section on 'Persecution in the Dioces of Lincolne', see Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments*, Book 7, p. 858. Available from: http//www.johnfoxe.org [accessed 18 August]. It is said that because Alice had 'a good memory & could recite much of þe scrip-tures, and other good bookes' she was called upon to do so in front of the men of Burford.

(d. ca. 1396) criticisms of literate women who disseminated religious teachings and cites an anonymous fourteenth-century Latin sermon on the 'simple men and women' who 'write and learn the Gospel, and as far as they can and know how, teach and scatter the word of God'.[460] A more well-known example of a woman being explicitly accused of preaching can be found in the case of Margery Kempe. In her conflict with the Archbishop, after she has refused to stop teaching and speaking about God, Margery is told that women are prohibited from 'prechyn'. Margery responds to this admonishment with the argument that she uses only 'good wordys' and does not speak from a 'pulpytt'.[461] Coletti, discussing this episode, perceives the terms that Margery employs in 'self-justification for […] public religious speech' as echoing 'the very terms that circulated in the earlier clerical assessments that Mary Magdalene was reputed to have performed in Marseilles'.[462] Though this connection between the *Book of Margery Kempe* and Magdalene hagiography may or may not exist in actuality, the episode elucidates those late-medieval concerns about women usurping male, clerical roles.

While the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* goes further than the other two narratives in representing Magdalene's potential identity as apostle to the apostles, the three texts are in agreement that this figure served an apostolic function since she preached to the people of Marseilles. The account in the *Gilte Legende* relates that the protagonist:

> arose her up pesibly withe a glad visage and a discrete tunge and well spekinge and beganne to preche Ihesu Crist and to withedrawe the peple from the worshippinge of idoles. And than alle hadde gret meruayle of the beauute and of the reson that was in her and of her faire spekinge, and it was no wonder though the mouth that so debonairly and so goodly had kussed the fete of oure Lorde were more enspired with the worde of God thanne other. (p. 471).

Although it is possible to trace in the passage the containment of subversive pressures since the radical potential of a woman preaching is softened by the account of Magdalene's

[460] Aston has taken the Latin sermon example (translated from Cambridge Univ. Lib., Ms I.i, 3.8, fo. 149r) from G. R. Owst's *Preaching in Medieval England*. See Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 49-50.
[461] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 126.
[462] Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, p. 143.

inimitable relationship with Christ on earth (her skill in preaching is attributed to the fact that her mouth had 'kussed the fete of oure Lorde', p. 471, rather than her rational mind), it seems significant that both the Lollards and Waldensians, two different heretical sects, employed the example of Magdalene's preaching to further their causes. Lollard Walter Brut, introduced above, defended women's preaching in his 1391 trial with the argument that 'blessed Mary Magdalen preached publicly in Marcilia [Marseilles] and in the area round about' and Dominican Moneta of Cremona (d. 1240) attacked the Waldensians in the *Summa adversus Catharos et Valdenses* (ca. 1241) for allegedly justifying female preaching with the claim that the Johannine Magdalene was given a commission to preach (Moneta argued that she was commissioned only to tell the disciples of Christ's resurrection).[463] In this respect, the dissident potential found in the accounts of Magdalene as First Witness might be felt to correspond with the depictions of Magdalene as a public preacher.[464] The narratives could be employed to provide justification for the heterodox, even heretical, activities of non-institutional teachers and preachers. They reflect and, as Brut's familiarity with Magdalene hagiography shows, also help facilitate the cultural production of pro-'women priests' arguments (arguments which counter dominant discourses about

[463] See Marx (trans.), 'On whether women are permitted to instruct men assembled in public', in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended,* ed. Blamires, pp. 251-5, pp. 251-2; and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'The Prostitute-Preacher: Patterns of Polemic against Waldensian Women Preachers', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 99-113, p. 105. It is relevant to the analysis in this chapter that Brut comments that Magdalene is called the '"Apostle of Apostles"' because 'through her preaching she converted [Marseilles] to Christ' (p. 252). Jansen refers to both the examples above in her consideration of the ways in which 'Mary Magdalen, *apostolorum apostola*, was invoked to justify the apostolates of heterodox and orthodox women alike'. See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 273.

[464] While the three texts do not discuss in detail the content of Magdalene's preaching, the Auchinleck legend elaborates that Magdalene preached: 'Of Jhesu in Carnacdun, / & how he suffred passioun/ For hir & ous and al mankinde –/ Of dedely sinne godde ous vnbinde' (ll. 129-32).

clerical authority).[465]

This contestation of clerical authority is relevant at the moment that the texts were composed. In his discussion of the teachings of John Wyclif (1328-84), Eamon Duffy states that:

> [Wyclif] rejected the value of ecclesiastical traditions, and denied the authority of pope or bishop. The Church consisted only of the elect, and so the visible Church, which contained many children of Satan, had no authority to bind or loose, and no coercive power. Since dominion came from grace, the true pope was simply the holiest Christian, and not the man in Rome or Avignon, who was indeed anti-Christ because of his exorbitant claims.[466]

There is clearly a difference between the reasons provided in this chapter for the hagiographical texts potentially and if developed to their fullest possible conclusions challenging the authority of the institutional Church of the day and those reasons provided by Duffy for Wyclif's attacks on medieval ecclesiastical authority. The question of Magdalene, as first witness, having a superior claim to authority is irrelevant here, for Wyclif's is a model of Christianity that seeks to do away with institutional authority figures *per se*. Having said that, the texts might be interpreted through the lens of late-medieval anti-institutional Church discourses such as those associated with Wyclif.[467] The unspoken questions raised by the texts about the right to sovereignty of the successors of Peter, coupled with the

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[465] Alcuin Blamires, in an article which discusses the issue of women's preaching in relation to the arguments of figures including Walter Brut, has also considered the relation between medieval Magdalene hagiography and late-medieval discourses on women preachers. After citing the words of the thirteenth-century Franciscan Eustace of Arras (ca. 1225-91) that 'if there is purity of life in a woman who preaches – as in the case of blessed Mary Magdalene and the blessed Catherine – nothing prevents her from having the fruit and crown for preaching, if she preaches', Blamires points out the significance of the fact that the *Legenda aurea* 'credits Mary Magdalene and Catherine with conspicuous evangelizing roles'. While Blamires does acknowledge that Eustace, 'writing in the 1260s', might not have 'been acquainted with the *Legenda*' (and he also cites Sherry Reames' observation that Jacobus 'sets women in their traditional place at the bottom of Christian society'), he contends that the dating 'does not matter greatly since [Eustace] would have been influenced by the same currents in thirteenth-century hagiography which influenced Jacobus'. Alcuin Blamires, 'Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints' Lives', *Viator* 26 (1995), 135-52 (142).

[466] Eamon Duffy, 'Religious belief', in *A Social History of England*, pp. 293-339, p. 324.

[467] See the Wycliffite sermon 'De papa' (ca. 1380) for some of his criticisms of the Pope: 'þe pope is [the] moost proud man of erþe'; the pope 'wol be closid in a castel wiþ greet aray'; he 'loueþ so myche worchip of þe world'; he 'sekiþ his oune glory' […]. Wyclif, 'De Papa', in *The English Works of Wyclif*, pp. 458-83, pp. 462, 463.

representations of Magdalene preaching (a role denied to women in the medieval Church, but enjoyed by women in some heretical sects), converges at some points with the ideas coming out of certain heterodox / anti-clerical traditions.[468] Despite the different context for Wyclif's writings (Wyclif is not interested in the debates about the protophany), it is possible to trace certain similarities in the interrogation of potentially unfounded religious authority figures.

The most subversive aspect of the hagiographical texts is in raising questions about the basis of the authority of the ecclesiastical leaders of the late-medieval period (while, at the same time, emphasizing Petrine, and therefore clerical, authority structures). The handling of Magdalene's relationship to Maximin and Lazarus turns out to be significant in this respect. After the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* relates that Lazarus and Maximin are made bishops – the text neither says who ordains them as bishops or explains the foundation for their authority – Bokenham moves on to describe how Magdalene embarked on a life of contemplation. The text narrates that '[i]n a wyldyrnesse she [Magdalene] took hyr habytacyoun/ *ordeynyd* by aungelys in a bareyn plaas' (ll. 6155-6, my emphasis). 'Ordeyned' may be a slightly provocative choice of words here, because it can refer to the ordination of the clergy.[469] That the female protagonist, who does not hold a position of ecclesiastical authority, is nevertheless described through language evoking notions of formal spiritual leadership could provide a note of consolation (or subversive questioning) for the spiritually enlightened lay person, male or female, excluded from a position of power in the hegemonic

[468] It is interesting, though, that 'Of feyned contemplatif lif', in *The English Works of Wyclif*, pp. 187-96, a text which F. D. Matthew believes to be 'an early work of Wyclif's' (p. 187), suggests that Magdalene did not have the 'office of prechynge' (p. 189). Responding to the way in which 'ypocritis' (p. 189) – lazy 'cleriks' (p. 189) – use the argument that 'magdaleyne chees to hereself þe beste part whanne she saat bisiden cristis feet & herde his word' to excuse themselves from having to 'preche cristis gospel' (p. 188), the writer argues that Magdalene is a special case because 'siþ sche was a womman [she] hadde not auctorite of goddis lawe to teche & preche opynly' (p. 189).

[469] Meaning 4g in the *Middle English Dictionary* includes for the verb 'ordeinen' a phrase from the *Assumption of the Virgin* alluding to being 'ordeyned […] to prest'. See Kuhn, *Middle English Dictionary: O-P* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980), pp. 252-61, p. 257. The sacrament of ordination involves the laying on of hands and so it is particularly pertinent that the *Gilte Legende* describes how Magdalene chose a place in the desert that 'was ordeyned to her by the hondes of aungellez' (p. 476).

medieval Church. Though Magdalene is not able to baptise the prince and princess (the *Gilte Legende* describes how they 'receyued bapteme of Seint Maximyen', p. 475), she receives a kind of ordination, figurative or otherwise, from above. Read in the light of *La Vie La Marie Magdalene* where the saint is personally responsible for the ordination of Christians in Aix, this passage might be felt to contribute to understandings of Mary Magdalene's religious authority.[470]

Summary

This chapter has identified various faultlines in the *vitae*'s representation of the theme of spiritual leadership. While outwardly conforming to the traditional patriarchal presentation of Peter's primary role within the Church, these texts also emphasize Magdalene's counter-heroic role as an alternative, conflictual source of spiritual authority. Produced during a period of religious debates concerning the role of women in the Church, Papal Schism, and the challenges to orthodox teachings by Wycliffite preachers, the two representations of orthodox, patriarchal authority; and its heterodox, subversive other remain unreconcilable – especially to the reader interested, then and now, in pursuing dissident readings.

[470] It is said that: 'La Magdaleyne après cel tens / Fist ordiner des cristiens - / Les uns ki saveint sermoner - / K'il entendisent a cel mester' ['After that time Magdalene / Had some Christians ordained [to the priesthood] - / Some who knew how to preach - / So that they might apply themselves to that service']. See ll. 315-18.

Chapter Four: 'O Prince, desyre to be honourable / Cherish thy folk and hate extorcioun': Narrative Visions of Poverty and Privilege in the Accounts of the Eremitical Life and Avaricious Prince Scene

Unforged was the hauberk and the plate;
The lambish peple, voyd of alle vyce,
Hadden no fantasye to debate,
But ech of hem wolde other wel cheryce.
No pryde, non envye, non avaryce,
No lord, no taylage by no tyrannye;
Humblesse and pees, good feith the emperice.
Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Former Age', ca. 1380s, ll. 49-55

In a passage which draws attention to the duties of the rich to the poor, Ecclesiasticus (the Book of Sirach) 4. 1-5 says:

> My son, do not cheat a poor man of the alms he asks, nor pass him by, with averted look, in his need. Wouldst thou despise his hungry glance, and add to the burden of his distress? Wouldst thou disappoint him in his bitter need by bidding him wait for the gift? Nay, spurn thou never the plea of the afflicted; look thy suppliant in the face, and of his poverty take good heed.

Bringing together ideas of poverty and charity, this excerpt provides important insights into one of the two narrative units discussed below. The reminder about the necessity of almsgiving, coupled with the emotive allusions to the poor man's 'hungry glance' and 'bitter need', corresponds with the account of Mary Magdalene's impassioned defence of charitable provision.

This chapter interrogates Magdalene's association with discourses of renunciation, and provides a largely socio-economic reading of the material. Though mainly focussed on the three late-medieval texts' treatments of poverty and privilege, it also develops further and provides different angles on issues including female unruliness, women preachers, and sin and reform (issues which have been introduced in the earlier chapters). The analysis focuses on two narrative episodes thus far unexplored in the thesis: the account of Mary Magdalene's time in the wilderness (that aspect of her medieval biography which converges with the Mary

of Egypt material) and the avaricious prince scene. The latter, found in the *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, describes Magdalene's admonitory dream visitations to the prince and princess of Marseilles as they lie sleeping in bed. In her strongly-worded denunciation of the uncharitable rich (who are also conceptualized as pagan), the protagonist might be understood as a figure of social criticism. She is here shown to be a counter-heroic figure in the field of socio-economics, an identity that lacks biblical precedent and has not generally been taken up in recent fictions.

Whereas chapters two and three have been concerned with containment and 'faultlines', the political relationships discussed in this chapter are more complex. Though it is possible to trace a third instance of containment in the avaricious prince scene, the episodes seem both to challenge and consolidate hegemonic structures. Joanne Findon, discussing the Digby play and protagonist, has written that:

> [The] concept of liminality is perhaps the most helpful lense [sic] through which to view the play's version of Mary Magdalene. As Kathleen Ashley has noted in her discussion of a real late-medieval woman, Margery Kempe, '*liminality* is the mediating state between customary categories in a transformative process. It is characterized by ambiguity and paradox, and – as "a realm of possibility" allows for new cultural combinations and new paradigms'. I argue that Mary Magdalene is depicted not so much as moving from one state to another (although she does do that in the course of the play) but as incorporating all options within herself, thus instantiating this concept of a "realm of possibility".[471]

This theory of liminality, one that informs Findon's understanding of the Digby Magdalene as 'resist[ing] and subtly undermin[ing] the oppressive force of polarized discourses of many kinds', is useful to a consideration of the hegemonic structures examined in the chapter.[472] Like the Magdalene of the eremitical life account and the avaricious prince scene, a figure

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[471] Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, pp. 9-10. Findon alludes to the seminal work of Victor Turner on liminality and acknowledges that Kathleen Ashley is here quoting from her study of Turner and cultural criticism. In *Rites de Passage The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), Victor Turner engages with the work of Arnold van Gennep. Although Turner provides an anthropological approach to the 'period of margin or "liminality"' (p. 93), ideas of 'transitions between states' (p. 95), 'ambiguity and paradox […] confusion of all the customary categories' (p. 97), and the 'transitional-being' (p. 95) all feature in his aptly-named chapter 'Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*' (pp. 93-111).

[472] Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 192.

who is conceptualized as human and non-human, ally to the poor and to the prosperous classes, the episodes combine at once radical and conservative potential. These episodes, and especially the avaricious prince episode, represent 'betwixt and between' moments in the texts. They put forward the interests of the poor, while simultaneously upholding top-down structures of power. Magdalene confronts what Bokenham describes as royal misrule, but also seems to act in ways that counter (or at least do not fully promote) the interests of the poor.

Ideas of poverty and power also inform Theresa Coletti's 2001 essay, which provides an economic reading of the *Mary Magdalen* drama. Arguing that the play can be read as an 'ambitious and nuanced tale about the value, circulation, and use of wealth and material goods', Coletti says that:

> [t]he play works to resolve contradictions between a spiritual ideology whose highest value counseled renunciation of the world and a prosperous social and economic environment whose moral fissures are registered in anxieties about property, status consciousness, and promotion of charity.[473]

In the course of her analysis, Coletti discusses *Dives and Pauper*, a text that 'endorses a practical ethic of charity that allows for the person of means to keep his goods and get to heaven' but which simultaneously privileges 'the spiritual superiority, and the greater difficulty, of pursuing poverty's path of "hye perfeccioun"'.[474] Her essay suggests that these same values concern the Digby play.[475] Coletti's thesis seems to be twofold: that the play presents a conservative perspective on socio-economic relations and that it 'furnishes a tolerant vision of the role that material well-being and economic activities might play in the

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[473] Theresa Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*": Hagiography, Lay Religion, and the Economics of Salvation in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*', *Speculum* 76 (2001), 337-78 (340 and 341).
[474] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 364. While not identical, this reading shares certain parallels with Carter Lindberg's 1993 interpretation of medieval understandings of poverty derived from the Bible and the arguments of the Church Fathers: 'The poor are favoured in God's sight, for God has specially chosen the poor for his own people. Indeed, God himself is among the poor, for God humbled himself in the incarnation to become a fellow pilgrim and wayfarer. Wealth is a danger to salvation, but this danger is effectively overcome through almsgiving. By giving alms to the poor, the rich atone for their sins and receive in return the intercessory prayers of the poor'. Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 27-8.
[475] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 364.

shaping of a spiritual life'.[476] In this way, the text appeals to 'late-medieval East Anglia's economically dominant classes' who also looked for ways to be 'poor of heart and remain in the world'.[477]

Unlike Coletti, who finds in the play a view of poverty 'from above', this chapter suggests that social and economic relationships in non-dramatic hagiographical account are marked by the same 'ambiguity and paradox' that Findon has argued is central to an understanding of the Digby Mary Magdalene.[478] Some representations of poverty and privilege in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende* especially (the *Festial* represents Magdalene's time in the wilderness, but omits the avaricious prince episode) have more subversive potential than Coletti finds in her analysis of the Digby play.[479] The accounts found in these two texts share what might be considered a conservative emphasis on the need for charity rather than from any structural social reform, but Bokenham and the author of the *Gilte Legende* do present Magdalene, a figure who later embarks on a life of absolute privation, as fiercely critical of social injustices deriving from the inequitable distribution of wealth.[480] As a result, the narratives help constitute a late-medieval literary tradition of writings on the topic of the uncharitable rich.[481] It is argued below that power relations in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, *Festial* and *Gilte Legende* are characterized by ambivalence and overdetermination: the texts occupy a liminal space on the frontiers between radical and

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[476] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 368.
[477] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 376.
[478] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 367. Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 10.
[479] It should be noted that the Digby play is substantially different from the non-dramatic Middle English texts. The play contains a number of original episodes and, as Coletti has acknowledged, provides 'more temperate' treatment of the avaricious prince scene. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 360, n. 68.
[480] See Coletti: 'In averring that *paupertas est donum Dei,* Mary Magdalene draws upon the medieval "language of charity" that, in Miri Rubin's phrase, legitimized existing power relationships; charity, as Richard Trexler states, "aimed at preserving corporative identification, not at fostering inter-class mobility"'. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 367.
[481] G. R. Owst's seminal study *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* includes discussion of medieval sermon literature on this theme. The chapters on 'The Preaching of Satire and Complaint' incorporate among other issues consideration of homiletic literature on the sins of avarice and pride; the misdeeds of the wealthy and powerful; and the criticisms of overly luxurious living. See G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter on the History of English Letters & of the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961).

reactionary. Magdalene confronts hierarchies relating to socio-economics and yet also acts in ways that uphold traditional hegemonic structures.

Before considering the avaricious prince scene, an episode that is important in bringing together and clarifying understanding of the themes, issues, and political relationships so far discussed in the thesis, it is illuminating to examine the presentation of Magdalene in the wilderness. Although the episode provides a much softer discourse on wealth and power than the avaricious prince scene, Magdalene can still be understood as a woman in competition with a figure of clerical authority (a representation which finds parallels with the spiritual conflicts discussed in the previous chapter).

Part One: The Eremitical Life and Holy Poverty

1. The 'Female Wild' Revisited

The hagiographical accounts of Mary Magdalene's life are structured around a movement from extreme wealth to absolute poverty. This shift is presented as correlating with the shift in her life from sinner to follower of God. The idea of renunciation lies behind the narrative structure of the Magdalene's legend even though in narrative chronology the heroine's entrance into the wilderness does not directly correlate with her renunciation of goods and power. Unlike some male saints, Magdalene does not undergo an immediate transition from a position of wealth and status to voluntary poverty. Caroline Walker Bynum has written that:

> Despite the fact that both chastity and marital status were more prominent themes in the *vitae* (written lives) of women than men, male saints were more likely to undergo abrupt adolescent conversions, including renunciations of wealth, power, marriage, and sexuality. Crisis and decisive change were more significant motifs in male than in female *vitae* throughout the later Middle Ages.[482]

[482] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), p. 24.

Though Magdalene's repentance correlates with her surrender of social, economic and sexual freedoms, her entrance into the wilderness represents her absolute renunciation of material goods and power.[483]

The concept of a retreat into the wilderness finds parallels in the narrative tradition of the Desert Fathers. The *Legenda aurea* account of the life of Saint Anthony relates that:

> When Anthony was twenty years old, he heard the following words read in church: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor'. He sold all he had, gave the proceeds to the poor, and from then on lived the life of a hermit.[484]

During his time as a hermit Anthony is portrayed as experiencing miracles, visions, temptations and on one occasion as being 'rapt in ecstasy'.[485] The saint's name, 'Anthony', is said by Jacobus to mean 'one who holds on to higher things and despises worldly things', an explanation which places in antithesis spiritual and temporal interests.[486] While the hagiographers' Magdalene, unlike Anthony, does not undergo a direct transition from prosperity, relative or otherwise, to voluntary poverty, the *Legenda aurea*'s depiction of Anthony's life provides some useful perspectives on the Magdalene *vitae*.[487] Just as Anthony's legend suggests the incompatibility of so-called 'higher' and 'worldly' things, the accounts of the Magdalene's life in the *Festial*, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and *Gilte Legende* place in dialectic worldly wealth and spiritual impoverishment with spiritual wealth and worldly impoverishment.[488] In the three texts Mary Magdalene the sinner is presented implicitly as poor in spiritual terms but rich in material power and possessions. As well as being the recipient of the familial castle (and, according to the *Festial*, all its lordship) the

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[483] It is, however, not entirely clear what Magdalene's material condition is prior to her entering into the wilderness. Indeed, while the protagonist is conceptualized as living a life of scarcity in Marseilles, the prince and princess do eventually decide to provide for the poor Christians and when the couple leave to visit Peter the *Gilte Legende* says that any possessions that they did not take they left 'in the kepinge of Mari Mauudelein' (p. 473).
[484] Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Anthony*, in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, I. 93-6, p. 93.
[485] Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Anthony*, p. 94.
[486] Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Anthony*, p. 93.
[487] I say 'relative or otherwise' since Anthony's erstwhile condition is not specified. Clearly, he has possessions since he renounces them, but his economic background is not elaborated.
[488] Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Anthony*, p. 93.

Gilte Legende represents the sinful figure as 'abound[ing] gretly in richesse' (p. 469) and the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* says that this heiress 'by successyoun / […] of fortune surmountyd in dygnyte' (ll. 5388-9).

The *Festial*, the earliest of the texts, describes Magdalene's entrance into the wilderness as corresponding with her loss of worldly pleasures (including company) and gain in spiritual benefits. In this account, the narrator recounts that:

> Þan for Magdaleyne wolde 3ef hyr alle to contemplacion, scheo 3ode priuely fer into wyldernesse and was þer xxx 3ere, vnknowon of alle men, wythoute mete or drynke. Þan vche day seven sythes angelus beron hyr vp into þe ayre, and þere sche was fullud wyth melody of angellus þat hur nedud none othyr bodyly fode. Bot whan God wolde þat scheo schulde passon oute of þis worlde, he made an holy preste to sene how angelus beron hur vp and doune. And he, for to wytton þe sothe whate þat was, he 3ode to þe place and halsodde 3yf þere were | any cristyn creature, þat he schulde speken and tellyn hym whatte he were. Þan answerid Magdaleyne and sayde þat scheo was a synful womman þat þe gospel spake of, þat whesse Crystes fette, and badde hym gone to Max[imin]us þe byschoppe, byddyng hym þat he come on Astur morowon to chyrch: 'for þere I wul meton hym'. […] And whan he [Maximin] com to chyrch, þan sawe he Magdaleyne borne vp wyth angelus too cubitus fro þe erthe, and þan he was agaste […] (p. 188).

Though the sermon does not describe the eremitical life in detail (and neither does it place so much emphasis earlier on Magdalene's wealth being a cause of sin), it makes clear that Magdalene is without worldly sustenance. The movement into the wilderness represents a kind of regression, since Magdalene, a figure who in the prince of Marseilles episode is proactive in acquiring food for the poor Christians, is here conceptualized as being completely dependent on divine provision. She is nourished by the 'melody of angellus' (p. 188) in the same way that an infant is sustained through lactation. This idea of regression also has social connotations, since Magdalene's return to a more infantile condition corresponds with discourses about a return to a simpler existence. Chaucer's 'The Former Age' (ca. 1380s), for example, represents a pastoral idyll, in which 'ther was no richesse' and man ate the fruit and berries which grew naturally and drank 'water of the colde welle'.[489]

[489] Chaucer, 'The Former Age', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 650-1, l. 26 and l. 8.

While the *Festial*'s treatment of the narrative episode is almost as sparse as the conditions endured by Magdalene in the wilderness, the *Gilte Legende* elaborates on the thirty years she spent in 'a sharpe place in [the] desert'. The narrator claims that 'ther was neuer cours of water ne comfort of trees ne of herbes' and that 'it was done for this cause, that it shulde be clerely shewed that oure Lorde wolde fede her with heuenly metis and not with erthely metis' (p. 476). Magdalene's existence is described as one of extreme privation. In fact, when the desert priest receives the 'mervailous uision' of Magdalene being lifted by angels (p. 476) he is represented as uncertain of her identity. That he summons her with the address 'yef thou be man or any other resonable creature […]' (p. 477) suggests the effects of starvation on her body: it is not clear to the priest that she is female.[490] Although 'man' (used here without the indefinite article) might be interpreted as 'human' rather than 'male', Angela Carter, discussing the hermit saint, has described Magdalene as 'transcending gender, sex obliterated', arguing that she 'comes to represent an even earlier incarnation of the "wild man of the woods" than John the Baptist'.[491] Whereas chapter two reads the unruly Magdalene as a 'wild girl' who challenges gender boundaries, this Magdalene is wild in a different sense: she occupies a liminal position on the boundaries between human / saint, human / animal, and woman / not-woman.

The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* also provides a detailed account of Magdalene's time in the 'wyldyrnesse' (l. 6155). In this text, the narrator relates that:

> In [this] place was growyng no tre,
> Ner herbe, ner watyr, ner no solace
> To hyr bodyly counfort in no degre
> (ll. 6158-60).

[490] Gender confusion is a common trope in medieval hagiographical tradition. Marina and Theodora are two examples of women saints who enter into monasteries disguised as men (Brother Marinus and Brother Theodore respectively). See Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Marina* and *Saint Theodora*, in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, I. 324-5 and I. 365-8.
[491] Carter, 'Impressions: The Wrightsman Magdalene', p. 411.

The wilderness, described as a 'bareyn plaas' (l. 6156) and a 'desolat plaas' (l. 6165), provides a fitting backdrop for Magdalene to embark on her spiritual goal of 'contemplacyoun' (l. 6152), a term that contains within itself the meaning of sight.[492] As in the accounts in the *Festial* and the *Gilte Legende*, this figure is described as being lifted by 'aungelys handys' (l. 6167) and as hearing with her 'bodyly eerys heuenely armonye' (l. 6168). Although she is deprived of worldly sustenance, and certainly of the 'dyuers metys' that the avaricious prince and princess are criticized for enjoying so much (l. 5845), this lack is remedied since she is provided for 'in body & soule' (l. 6170). Just as Exodus 16 relates that God sustained the Israelites in the desert with manna or 'bread […] from heaven' (16. 4), Magdalene is nourished when she is lifted heaven-bound by angels. While the text does not elaborate on whether she experiences visions in these moments of 'heightened' illumination (the encounters might themselves be understood as divine *showings*), it is significant that the priest's sightings of Magdalene are described in quasi-mystical terms pertaining to sight and knowledge.[493] Having entered into the wilderness in pursuit of 'contemplacyoun' (l. 6177), he is 'shewy[n] þis reuelacyoun' of the levitating Magdalene (l. 6178) and is later rewarded by this figure with 'knolechyng' (l. 6210) of those things which his 'soule desyryth' to know (l. 6215).

2. (Voluntary) Poverty and Spiritual Enlightenment

On one level, the narrative accounts of Mary Magdalene's eremitical life correspond with monastic and mystical discourses about renunciation as a path to spiritual illumination. Although it is not explicitly stated, the texts seem to accord with the idea that poverty (a term that in this period included the sense of 'lacking in power'), and especially voluntary poverty,

[492] See Santha Bhattacharji: 'Both the Latin *contemplatio* and the Greek word *theoria*, which it translates, have as their route syllable *te*, "see, sight". Santha Bhattacharji, 'Medieval Contemplation and Mystical Experience', in *Approaching Medieval Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis, Christianity and culture (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 51-9, p. 51.
[493] *Showings* is, of course, the term used by Julian of Norwich.

is an important requirement for enlightenment.[494] Indeed, it is central to medieval monastic ideals. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the central figure in the reforming Cistercian order of the twelfth century, laid the foundations for much of the medieval Church's approach to contemplation. His writings, which present, in many different ways, approaches to Christian spirituality as the route to knowledge of Truth, took it as axiomatic that the soul could not find this if encumbered with wealth and material concerns. He writes in 'On Conversion' (ca. 1140) that 'the insatiable love of riches is a desire which brings far more torment to the soul than their enjoyment brings refreshment'.[495]

The idea, of course, also continued after the medieval period. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (ca. 1579-85), the mystic and Carmelite monk St. John of the Cross (1542-91) describes the necessity of passing through the 'dark night (the mortification of the appetites and the denial of pleasure in all things)' in order to attain 'divine union with God'.[496] And, moving on to represent this journey of the soul in terms of 'a person ascending [the] mount of perfection', St. John states that the 'road and ascent to God […] necessarily demands a habitual effort to renounce and mortify the appetites; the sooner this mortification is achieved, the sooner the soul reaches the top'. He makes the point that before being able to

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[494] See Ludo J. R. Milis, drawing on K. Bosl: 'In the middle ages, the word *poor* did not primarily refer to the person without goods but to one who lacks power'. Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*, p. 18.
[495] Bernard of Clairvaux, 'On Conversion', in *Bernard of Clairvaux Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 65-97, p. 89.
[496] St. John of the Cross, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (London: Thomas and Nelson and Sons, 1966), pp. 68-292, p. 77. St. John of the Cross does, however, make the point that riches and wealth are not in themselves intrinsically problematic (the problem comes from *attachment* to worldly goods). Indeed, he argues that 'we are not discussing the mere lack of things; this lack will not divest the soul, if it craves for all these objects. We are dealing with the denudation of the soul's appetites and gratifications; this is what leaves it free and empty of all things, even though it possesses them. Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it; rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within it that causes the damage'. Drawing on David's words in *Psalms*, the point is made that it is possible to be 'manifestly rich' but poor if the 'will [is] not fixed on riches' and a person lives 'as though really poor'. From the opposite angle, it is also possible to be 'actually poor' but not be in 'true poverty' if the 'appetite of [the] soul' is 'rich and full' (p. 77). This sixteenth-century view reflects the long, and often controversial, journey of the Church, in its attitudes to poverty (tied up with political conflicts over the Church's vast wealth), towards an acceptance that wealth in the world was not necessarily intrinsically a source of evil and / or spiritual blindness, and literal poverty was not necessarily a more blessed state than material wealth.

experience the Divine a person 'must not only renounce all things, by leaving them at the bottom, but also restrict his appetites (the beasts) from pasturing on the mountainside'.[497]

In light of these Christian discourses which present poverty, particularly elective poverty, as a route to contemplative or mystical knowledge, it is relevant that Magdalene, a figure who chooses to renounce both power and possessions, is visualized as experiencing otherworldly phenomena. While the *Gilte Legende* suggests that the wealthy and sinful Magdalene owned 'seruantes' (p. 469), the Magdalene of the wilderness lacks authority over any person or anything.[498] Although the heroine had already given her possessions away after the Ascension (p. 469), this episode develops to the furthest possible degree the idea of renunciation: Magdalene is shown here to renounce the world itself and to place herself entirely in God's keeping. Meshing with discourses like the "*Sister Catherine" Treatise* and the 'Ascent of Mount Carmel' (those which associate divine union with self-denial), one result of Magdalene's surrender of worldly wealth and status seems to be that she is able to encounter certain mysteries of divinity.[499] The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* does suggest that Magdalene experienced special knowledge or insight before entering into the wilderness since she was shown a 'mysterye […] of [Christ's] sepulture' prior to the Crucifixion (l. 5674). Nevertheless, the Magdalene as she is represented in the *Gilte Legende*'s account of the eremitical life is not only granted foresight as a prophet might be (she seems to anticipate

[497] St. John of the Cross, 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', p. 83.
[498] The *Gilte Legende* comments that Martha 'minystred to knightes and to seruauntes and to pore men her necessitees' (p. 469). There is no question in Pseudo-Cavalca's Italian legend that Magdalene owned servants since the text comments that the post-penitent Magdalene and Lazarus 'renounced the lordship of the land, saying that they would no longer retain [the people] as servants, but esteem them as brothers and dear friends' (p. 44).
[499] In the opening of the *"Sister Catherine" Treatise*, the female protagonist, who is inspired by desert saints including Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, also refers to the need to 'leave behind honor and property, friends and family, and all exterior comfort' (p. 351) in order to find the 'fastest way to […] eternal salvation' (p. 350). This mystical text emphasizes the importance of poverty since although 'Sister Catherine' is prepared to hold on to 'water and bread and a frock' when she goes into exile (p. 355), she desires to be so poor that she has to 'leave [herself] behind' (p. 355). While the text does not say that the protagonist experiences 'mysterious and deep things' (p. 358) simply because she renounces worldly things and herself, the fact that 'she submitted to being the least of all human beings, and poor' (p. 360) is given as one of the ten factors that benefitted her 'most on the way to [her] eternal salvation' (p. 359).

her death, p. 477, as Bokenham's Magdalene is described as foreseeing Christ's), but experiences supernormal phenomena such as levitation.

The texts are in agreement that 'euery day atte eueri Houre of the day [Magdalene] was lefte up an hyghe withe aungelles and herde the glorious songge of the heuenly felawship' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 476). Though the hagiographers do not discuss in detail Magdalene's levitations, it is interesting to note that the accounts in the *Festial* and the *Hooly Wummen* make reference to how Magdalene is lifted in the air 'seven' times (*Festial*, p. 188). Perhaps owing to anxieties about the wilderness as a site of diabolic temptation (Saint Anthony, for example, is a saint who is described, during his time as a hermit, as having 'experienced countless trials inflicted by the demons'), the references to the holy number seven show that Magdalene's beyond-natural encounter should be understood as a miracle and not an example of black magic.[500] It is also presumably an allusion to the Canonical Hours. Haskins, in the context of a discussion of Margaret of Cortona's (1247-97) identification with Magdalene, states that:

> [l]evitation was one of the paramystical manifestations of divine grace and especial holiness. As the souls of these holy people soared heavenward, so it seemed sometimes did their bodies whilst they contemplated or received the eucharist.

Since Magdalene has (advertently or inadvertently) ridden herself of those worldly influences that figures like St. John of the Cross posit as anathema to the quest for a deeper level of spiritual consciousness, she is able to experience this 'manifestation[…] of divine grace'. Though she is not described, unlike Margaret, as experiencing the 'so-called mystic marriage' in which 'Christ [comes] to the centre of her soul', she is still shown to transcend the realm of normative sensory experience.[501]

While Magdalene is not explicitly described as receiving heavenly visions (revelations would be a better term since the *Gilte Legende* says that she *hears* the 'right suete songe of

[500]Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Anthony*, p. 93. Of course, the source for these traditions about diabolic testing lies in the account of Christ's temptation in the desert. See Matthew 4. 1-11.
[501] Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, p. 187.

the heuenly felawshippe', p. 477, but does not say what she *sees* during these moments of literal and spiritual elevation), she experiences a number of other marvels. The desert priest, who is described in the *Gilte Legende* as having a 'mervailous uision' of this figure (p. 476), is conceptualized as being unable to reach the 'secrete heuenly place' in which Magdalene resides (p. 477). As in the description in Thomas Malory's 'The Sankgreal' (1469-70) of how Lancelot was powerless before the holy vessel and 'felle to the erthe, and had no power to aryse, as he that had loste the power of hys body, and hys hyrynge and syght', the narrator relates that the priest's 'thighes begonne to wexse so stiff as though they hadde be harde bounde' when he attempted to reach the holy place (p. 476).[502] Given that this place is represented as one that 'none erthely man might come to' (p. 477), Magdalene might be understood as occupying a transitional state between human and saint, an outcome perhaps of her mysterious encounters with the Divine.

While the reference to this 'secrete heuenly place' (p. 477) is relevant in light of Findon's discussion of the complexities of space in the Digby play, it is also important in light of the Magdalene's broader characterization on the borders of human and saint / divine being.[503] Indeed, this figure seems to be identified in almost celestial terms in the moments prior to her death. Matthew 17 describes how Jesus took James, Peter and John 'up on to a high mountain' (17. 1) and he 'was transfigured in their presence, his facing shining like the sun' (17. 2). Similarly, Magdalene, when she appears to Maximin in the oratory on the day of her death, is described as having a face that shone 'as it hadde be a bright beme of the sonne' (p. 478) and as having been raised '.ij cubites of hyght' above the earth (p. 477). Just as Matthew represents the men as being 'overcome with fear' (17. 6) when they hear a

[502] Malory, 'The Sankgreal', in *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 577.
[503] Though Findon discusses a number of different types of space (for example, liminal space), her comments on the Digby queen's pilgrimage to Jerusalem under the spiritual guidance of Magdalene are particularly interesting. Findon, referring to the question of whether the queen actually visits Jerusalem, suggests that 'this remarkable excursion, with Mary Magdalene as guide, takes place in a spiritual space that is apparently invisible to other humans like the King and St Peter'. Her comments here are significant since this 'secrete heuenly place' (p. 477) in the wilderness poses a similar geographical problem. Is it to be understood in spiritual or material terms? Is it part of the geography of the world or the heavens? See Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 179.

voice from the clouds tell them that 'This is my beloved son' (17.5), Maximin 'dredde[s] for to go' to Magdalene (p. 477) when he sees her in the 'quere in the felawshippe of aungeles' (p. 477). That the imagery of the Transfiguration is employed at this point is significant since the Transfiguration makes clear Christ's hybrid identity as both god and man. Likewise, at this point Magdalene of the wilderness is represented as being if not divine as close to divinity as any earthly person can be. The reference to the 'sauour of suetnesse', or odour of sanctity, remaining after her death (*Gilte Legende*, p. 478), a common sign of holiness in saints' legends, is testament to her having attained saint status.

I have suggested above that Magdalene's embracing of poverty assists in her attainment of spiritual enlightenment, an idea which finds parallels in mystical and monastic discourses. Her surrender of goods and power goes hand-in-hand with her experience of divine mysteries. After electing to embark on a life of absolute privation, she experiences levitation; is fed by angels; gains access to a 'secrete heuenly place' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 477); and, prior to her death, is described in terms which liken her to the transfigured Christ.

In view of this, it is possible to trace in the narrative episode a similar vision of poverty 'from above' to that identified by Coletti in the Digby play. Coletti has pointed out that in 'Christian history, wealth and high status are crucial enablers of women's religious and spiritual authority: they create opportunities for the holiness associated with voluntary poverty'.[504] Implicit in Coletti's observation is the acknowledgement that it is necessary to possess wealth and power in order to be able to renounce wealth and power. As Coletti acknowledges, 'a voluntary turn from wealth to poverty […] is a gesture that emerges frequently as an option for the prosperous classes'.[505] In this respect, Magdalene of the wilderness, a figure who is described in the opening of the *Gilte Legende* as 'abound[ing] gretly in richesse' (p. 469), might be felt to provide a model for wealthy and powerful readers

[504] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 370, n. 100.
[505] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 369.

such as Bokenham's patron Isabel Bourchier. She might also offer a spiritual paradigm for those nuns of Cambridge for whom Thomas Burgh comprised the manuscript containing Bokenham's legendary.[506]

3. Renunciation as Liminal Discourse?

While Magdalene's renunciation of worldly goods and power can be read in terms of monastic and mystical discourses on the significance of poverty, and particularly elective poverty, as a path to deeper spiritual enlightenment, there is another level of meaning to all this. This section moves on to consider the narrative account of Mary Magdalene's eremitical life in relation to some of the more subversive elements of the holy poverty theme. Before doing so it is necessary to provide a brief proviso: although in the later Middle Ages certain discourses of holy poverty and renunciation were to become contentious owing to their association with heresy and heterodoxy, ideas of holy poverty and renunciation are not in themselves innately problematic. The orthodox *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (ca. 1410), describing the Virgin, says:

> Bot in þis pore & symple worldly array what gostly riches & inward confort & ioy she hade.' may no tonge telle. | Wherfore if we wole fele þe trew ioy & confort of Jesu'. we most wiþ him & wiþ his modere loue'. pouerte, mekenes & bodily penance os he gaf vs ensaumple of alle þese here in [h]is birþe & first comyng in to þis world.[507]

It is not only medieval devotional texts but scripture that places emphasis on the desirability of poverty. Matthew 5. 3 states that '[b]lessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs' and Matthew 5. 6 that 'those who hunger and thirst for holiness […] shall have their fill'. Further, Matthew's gospel contains the well-known teaching that 'it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye, than for a man to enter the kingdom of heaven when he is rich' (19. 24) and Christ's advice (advice that the *Legenda aurea* describes as influencing

[506] See Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 23.
[507] Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, p. 39.

Anthony) that if 'thou hast a mind to be perfect, go home and sell all that belongs to thee; give it to the poor, and so the treasure thou hast shall be in heaven' (19. 21).

Despite the scriptural basis for teachings about poverty and renunciation, these ideas were to become increasingly controversial towards the latter part of the medieval period. In *The Two Cities* (a study focusing on the earlier period 1050-1320), Malcolm Barber argues that one of the main strains of heresy found after the twelfth century combined the idea of 'a return to a life of apostolic poverty' with anti-clerical, millennial, and anti-sacerdotal elements.[508] The return to the apostolic life, at least as it was understood by medieval mendicant groups, meant going back to, even going beyond, a simpler life associated with the apostles and emphasized the importance of itinerant preaching. This ideal of apostolic poverty can be found in Acts 2. 45 where the apostles are described as having sold 'their possessions and their means of livelihood, so as to distribute to all, as each had need'.

Part of the reason why dialogues of apostolic poverty were considered so problematic is that they often contributed to the anti-clerical discourses in contemporaneous cultural circulation. Judy Ann Ford, in the context of a discussion of those medieval groups who advocated a return to the apostolic life, writes that:

> [Reformers such as Peter Valdès (d. ca. 1218)] frequently were castigated as heretics, in part for usurping the clerical responsibility for interpreting the scriptures and preaching, but more especially for extending their praise of poverty into an attack on the hierarchical church for being rich in lands and material possessions.[509]

That Ford shows how preaching on the desirability of poverty could so effortlessly slip into an attack on the materialism associated with the institutional Church is significant in light of Wycliffite texts on the 'poverty and privilege' theme. In the Wycliffite tract 'The Order of Priesthood', the writer discusses 'summe errours of prestis'.[510] After beginning by discussing

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[508] Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050-1320* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 180.
[509] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 102.
[510] F. D. Matthew tentatively suggests that this treatise 'may be written by Wyclif'. See Wyclif (?), 'The Order of Priesthood', in *The English Works of Wyclif*, pp. 164-80, p. 164 (F. D. Matthew) and p. 166.

the problem of 'symonye', the narrator moves onto condemn those priests who 'don þe masse more for money & bodily welfare þan for deuocion & worschipe of god', comparing them to 'Iudas'.[511] The tract also criticizes priests for providing an example of 'glotonye [and] ydelnesse'; for offering 'veyn preieris' in order to receive money; for enjoying a luxurious existence of 'mete & drynk of þe beste & riche cloþis & softe beddis'; and; and for discouraging other 'riche men […from paying] almes'.[512] While there is a difference between endorsing holy poverty and condemning those holy men who are corrupted by wealth, the attacks in this tract on avaricious priests form the flip side of the coin to the pro-poverty discourses that were to become so influential.[513]

Given that the Magdalene of the wilderness, a figure who is associated earlier in the narrative with preaching, is represented as choosing to live without property and possessions, there might be subversive potential (in terms of the association with heterodoxy and heresy) in the narrative accounts of her eremitical life. The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* begins the description of her thirty years as a hermit with the statement:

> For from hens-forward hyr hert was set
> To yeuyn hyr oonly to contemplacyoun,
> And al þing forsake þat myht hyr let
> (ll. 6151-3).

The wording of the line 'And al þing forsake þat myht hyr let' (l. 6153), translated by Sheila Delany as '[A]nd to give up anything that might interfere', is interesting, since it is not clear if there is any 'þing' (l. 6153) that Magdalene does not forsake.[514] As in the *Festial* and the *Gilte Legende*, it is not specified whether Magdalene is naked when she enters into the

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[511] Wyclif (?), 'The Order of Priesthood', pp. 166, 167. Note that medieval understandings of Judas as the 'evil one' – the man who 'some say' 'regularly stole one-tenth of all that was given to Christ' – is extended in medieval hagiography. The *Legenda aurea* makes tentative reference to the unconfirmed tradition from 'apocryphal history' that Judas, having been put to sea at birth, unknowingly married his biological mother and killed his father. See Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Matthias, Apostle*, in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, I. 166-71, pp. 167, 168.
[512] Wyclif (?), 'The Order of Priesthood', pp. 168, 170, 176.
[513] Ford has even cited the arguments of Charles Oman that Franciscan preaching on poverty might have played a part in influencing John Ball's role in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 103-4.
[514] Bokenham, 'Mary Magdalen's Life', in *A Legend of Holy Women*, trans. Delany, p. 121.

wilderness or whether she possesses any form of clothing. The *Gilte Legende* refers to the fact that 'Iosephus' [Josephus] 'saiethe that whanne the preest come to [Magdalene] he fonde her enclosed in her celle, and she asked of hym a clothe' (p. 478) – an apparent mix-up with the Mary of Egypt legend – but the texts neither described Magdalene as dressed or not dressed (she is also not explicitly represented as residing in a cell).[515] It was not in fact uncommon for medieval images of Magdalene in her incarnation as hermit saint to represent her as nude, save for her abundance of hair.[516] Though the question of clothing might seem inconsequential, the *Cum inter nonnullos* of 1323 decreed that Franciscan arguments that Christ and his apostles owned nothing amounted to heresy.[517] If Bokenham's Magdalene, a figure who has 'bodyly counfort in no degre' (l. 6160) is understood as choosing to be without even clothing some readers might take the implication that the text aligns itself with more heterodox discourses on the renunciation theme.[518]

This suggestion of possible heterodoxy is compounded by the representations in the *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* of the desert priest as lacking the spiritual knowledge possessed by Magdalene, a woman and a non-cleric: representations that contain shadowy, though never developed, hints of anti-clericalism. Although chapter three has acknowledged that the legends depict Magdalene as receiving the Eucharist from Bishop Maximin prior to her death (corresponding with orthodox perspectives on the privileges of the clergy), this earlier meeting between Magdalene and the priest, particularly as it is represented in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, makes it explicit that the desert priest is less

[515] Although generally the vague term 'place' is used, the priest in the *Gilte Legende* refers to Magdalene as residing in a 'pitte' (p. 477).
[516] Jansen has discussed the significance of medieval images of Magdalene as clothed only with her hair. She writes that 'representations of the Magdalen's nakedness could be construed as her post-conversion condition of innocence and purity. But given her prior association with sins of the flesh, medieval depictions of the hair-covered and naked Magdalen did more than evoke images of edenic innocence: they also pointed back to the sexual aspect of her nudity, a reminder of her past as a sexual sinner'. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 132-4. See pp. 131-3 for a reproduction of some of these images.
[517] Janet Burton, 'Renunciation', in *A Social History of England*, pp. 356-68, p. 364.
[518] The issue of clothing is also interesting in light of the set piece on the avaricious prince. While Magdalene refers to the poor Christians as being hungry, thirsty and lacking in property, Jane Cartwright has noted that the Middle Welsh version of the legend is unusual in describing the Christians as naked. See Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 137.

spiritually knowledgeable than his female, non-clerical counterpart.[519] Where Magdalene is described as being fed by angels and encountering firsthand divine phenomena such as levitation, the closest that the priest can come to experiencing what his 'soule desyreth' (l. 6215) is to hear Magdalene talking about how '[a]ungelys lyftyn' her seven times a day (l. 6237). What is more, it is relevant that Bokenham's Magdalene is represented as telling the priest that he will have '*suffycyent* certyfying, / *As mych* as it *nedyth* to be k[n]owyn of þe' (ll. 6216-1, my emphasis). It is notable how many qualifying terms and statements are used to describe the priest's initiation into Christian esotericism since there is a substantial difference between knowing 'euere thyng/ Wych [a person's] soule desyryth' (ll. 6214-15) and having 'suffycyent' knowledge of what is necessary (as opposed to desirable) for a person to know. Just as Bokenham's Magdalene is given a commission to tell Peter and the disciples about the Resurrection, so in this part of the narrative she has the responsibility of imparting spiritual knowledge to the hermit priest. It is possible, in this episode too, to read Magdalene as a counter-heroine in the field of theology.

The poverty and privilege theme, as it is represented in the account of Mary Magdalene's eremitical life, might thus be understood as functioning on a number of different levels. While on the one hand the texts correspond with certain mystical, and indeed, monastic discourses on the importance of renunciation, they have more subversive potential in a cultural moment where discussions of holy poverty attracted anxieties about heresy and heterodoxy. Though there is nothing innately problematic about the messages being promoted in this narrative episode, it is noticeable that the *Festial*, a text that is generally more conservative in its treatment of socio-economic themes, is careful to say only that Magdalene was deprived of food and drink and completely glosses over the account found in other texts

[519] A comparison might be drawn with the "*Sister Catherine" Treatise*, which presents 'Sister Catherine' as surpassing the confessor in spiritual knowledge. See *The "Sister Catherine" Treatise*.

of the hermit priest's implied spiritual failings.[520] In his discussion of that Mary of Egypt legend included in the manuscript containing Ælfric's saints' lives, Andrew P. Scheil writes that:

> Although the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* is of considerable antiquity, Ælfric was reluctant to translate such texts in the *Lives of Saints* collection. In a well-known passage in the Preface to the *Lives of Saints*, he warns that he will not translate certain *vitae*, which contain "multa subtilia…quae non conueniunt aperiri lacis, nec nos ipsi ea quimus implore" [many subtle points…which should not be laid open to the laity, nor are we ourselves able to understand them]. For Ælfric, the story of Mary and Zosimus would have contained too many elusive points of doctrine; it was too flamboyant, too open to *gedwild* ("heresy").[521]

The representations of Magdalene's time in the wilderness could provide a spiritual model for orthodox forms of renunciation, but the conceptualizations of Magdalene as absolutely poor, especially when combined with the texts' shadowy anti-clericalism and apparent justification elsewhere for female (which in the later Middle Ages would translate as non-licensed) preaching, might adversely add fuel to the flames of contemporaneous poverty debates. It is possible, again, to find in the account of Magdalene's time in the wilderness evidence of her counter-heroism.

Part Two: The Avaricious Prince Scene and Secular Poverty

1. Representations of the Angry Dream Visitant

Having suggested that the narrative accounts of Mary Magdalene's eremitical life exist on the borders between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the remainder of this chapter concentrates on arguably the most liminal and overdetermined aspect of the legends: the episode found in the

[520] Though the hermit priest is not explicitly criticized in the *Gilte Legende* or *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, it is noticeable that the *Festial* (composed for parish priests to read out to their congregation) omits all the material on the priest being unable to reach the secret holy place and knowing himself to be 'vnworthy' (*Legendys*, l. 6204).

[521] Andrew P. Scheil, 'Bodies and Boundaries in the Old English Life of St. Mary of Egypt', *Neophilologus* 84 (2000), 137-56, (138). This article touches on a couple of points discussed in the analysis above. Indeed, Scheil makes reference to ideas of liminality (he argues that Mary of Egypt's 'experience in the church has allowed her to enter a liminal space in which she is under the protection and guidance of the divine, yet not fully healed of her sexual, bodily corruption') and also alludes to Saint Anthony's warnings that 'monks should always be wary of the illusions of the devil'. See p. 147 and p. 142.

Legendys of Hooly Wummen and the *Gilte Legende* depicting the Magdalene's admonitory dream appearances to the uncharitable prince and princess of Marseilles as they lie sleeping in bed.[522] Appendix 2.4 provides a synopsis of the account as it is represented in the *Gilte Legende*.

Where the discussion above focuses on Magdalene's holy poverty (poverty that has a largely voluntary basis), the avaricious prince scene is concerned with secular (and mainly involuntary) poverty.[523] Since the avaricious prince episode contributes greatly to understandings of the texts' engagement with themes pertaining to poverty and privilege but also brings together a number of different threads discussed so far in the thesis, it forms the basis for the discussion in the remainder of the chapter. This part analyzes the scene in relation to its literary contexts, tracing links with some of the literature of complaint in contemporaneous cultural circulation. It also considers the significance of the fact that Magdalene in her incarnation as dream visitant appears first to the princess alone. Part three examines some of the questions coming out of the episode and interrogates the politics of this narrative episode: for example, should Magdalene, a figure who is earlier represented as a wealthy heiress, be understood as a veritable authority on the 'inequitable distribution of

[522] Both Coletti and Findon have discussed the (different) treatment of the episode by the Digby playwright. Coletti comments on the way in which the Digby playwright revises the episode to represent a more willingly charitable royal couple who absorb 'a lesson about corporal works of mercy'. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', 360-1 (p. 361). Findon's more detailed analysis of the Digby episode considers a number of issues including liminality of space; the nature of Magdalene's visitation; the different ways in which the visitation is understood by the couple (she draws on Laura Severt King's reading to suggest that 'the King thinks that it is a marvellous and beautiful dream, while his wife perceives it as a direct message from God, perhaps what medieval dream theorists would have termed a *somnium coeleste* or an *oraculum*'); the play's more positive representation of the princess (here referred to as a queen); and the importance of the fact that Magdalene appears to the couple in a white mantle. See Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint,* pp. 171-7 (p. 175).

[523] Coletti draws a distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' poverty in her article. The reason that I modify these terms slightly is that the *Gilte Legende* represents Magdalene as having chosen to sell her things and give her money to the apostles after Christ's Ascension (admittedly fourteen years before her arrival in Marseilles) and the reader is never certain as to how much wealth Magdalene possesses before she chooses to renounce the world and enter into the wilderness. See Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 359. Clopper's analysis makes clear that Magdalene's economic situation is more clear-cut in the play since he alludes to the fact that the Digby Magdalene experiences a 'turn from worldly governance of the king's estate' to a life of contemplation in which she 'has no material possessions, not even food and drink and possibly not even shelter'. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, p. 246.

wealth' theme? It also considers the implications of the episode for women and non-wealthy, non-*gentil*, non-powerful factions of late-medieval society.

While Magdalene's association with poverty is not one of the more well-known aspects of her tradition (this aspect of her counter-heroism is largely specific to the Middle Ages), there are powerful biblical roots to the account of Magdalene's admonitory address to the avaricious prince and princess.[524] Chapter two acknowledged the way that Lazarus, a figure interpreted in medieval hagiographical accounts as Mary Magdalene's brother, was a composite saint, and his dual identity as both Lazarus of Bethany and the leper with the sores is relevant to the discussion here. Luke 16. 19-31 says:

> There was a rich man once, that was clothed in purple and lawn, and feasted sumptuously every day. And there was a beggar, called Lazarus, who lay at his gate, covered with sores, wishing that he could be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, but none was ready to give them to him; the very dogs came and licked his sores. Time went on; the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom; the rich man died too, and found his grave in hell. And there, in his suffering, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he said, with a loud cry, Father Abraham, take pity on me; send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in the water, and cool my tongue; I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, My son, remember that thou didst receive thy good fortune in thy life-time, and Lazarus, no less, his ill fortune; now he is in comfort, thou in torment. And beside all this, there is a great gulf fixed between us and you, so that there is no passing from our side of it to you, no crossing over to us from yours. Whereupon he said, Then, father, I pray thee send him to my own father's house; for I have five brethren; let him give these a warning so that they may not come, in their turn, into this place of suffering. Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to these. They will not do that, father Abraham, said he; but if a messenger comes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he answered him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will be unbelieving still, though one should rise from the dead.

That the medieval Lazarus of Bethany was often understood as the poor man at the gate, a figure denied even the 'crumbs' that fell from 'the rich man's table' (16. 21), is important to a consideration of this part of the legend. Indeed, Magdalene, who is described in the *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* as attending Marseilles with her brother Lazarus, is

[524] Coletti has also noted that Magdalene has tended to be associated more often with penitence, but she refers to a couple of Middle English texts (such as the B text of *Piers Plowman* and *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*) in which this figure is associated with poverty. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 366.

conceptualized in the avaricious prince scene in contrast to the wealthy pagan rulers, rulers who enjoy the same fine clothing and sumptuous foods as the rich man in Luke.[525] Further, it is relevant that this account ends with the rich man asking for a messenger to come from the dead to warn his wealthy brethren to amend their ways (16. 30). Although Magdalene is not represented as an otherworldly visitor from the dead, warning the living to repent and eschew luxury before they face death and Judgement (as is the admonitory ghost of Guinevere's mother in the *Awntyrs off Arthur*), she is nonetheless distinguished from other humans at this point in the narrative.

Whereas the *Festial* omits the avaricious prince scene, the *Gilte Legende* represents Magdalene in her incarnation as fearsome dream visitant. The text relates that when the Christians arrived in Marseilles 'thei founde none that wolde receyue hem into her hous'. After describing how the preaching Magdalene 'reproued [the prince's] sacrifice' to the idols, the narrator states that the protagonist appeared to the prince's wife in a nightly vision and asked:

> How is it, sethe thou hast so gret plente of richesse, that thou durst leve the pore seruauntes of oure Lorde dye for hunger and for [threst and for] colde?

The lady, who is represented as being too scared to tell her husband about this vision, receives another visitation from Magdalene on the second night. On this second occasion, Magdalene tells her again, and in no uncertain terms, that she must 'stere her husbond for to refresshe the pore seruauntes of oure Lorde' (p. 471). Since the princess remains silent, Magdalene appears on the third night to both the prince and his wife. In this third vision, Magdalene appears to the couple with an 'angri visage' and chastises them for refusing to assist the destitute Christians when they have the material means to do so. Calling the prince

[525] Nicholas Bozon's *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*, however, distinguishes between Lazarus of Bethany (brother of Magdalene) and Lazarus the leper. The opening lines of the legend relate: 'Ele out un frer chivaler / Ke Lazer avez oÿ nomer; / Ne mye k'i fut leperous / Meis son noun fut Lazarous.' ['She had a brother, a knight, / Whom you have heard named Lazer; / Not that he was a leper, / But his name was Lazarus']. (ll. 13-16).

a 'tyraunt' and a 'felon', the protagonist prophesizes that the couple will not 'ascape so lyghtly' nor 'parte witheoute ponisshinge' (p. 472) if they continue to hoard their wealth.

Magdalene's identity as formidable dream visitant is further developed in the Bokenham text. Here the protagonist is described as looking on the couple with 'a ferful eye' (l. 5834). Though the text zooms in on Magdalene's eye, this action displaces discussion of her equally terrifying feature: her tongue.[526] After experiencing Magdalene's biting attack (or tongue-lashing) on their acquisitive behaviour, the narrator describes how the princess 'sore began to syhyn & grone' (l. 5867) and her husband 'eek made mone' (l. 5868). The princess is described as expressing anxiety that the couple will 'fallyn in-to þe indignacyoun / Of [Magdalene's] god, & myscheuously deye' (ll. 5880-1). The result of the couple's encounter with Magdalene is that they allow the Christians into their palace and minister to them 'alle þat þei had nede' (ll. 5884): unlike the rich man in Luke, they are given the chance to amend their misdemeanours and to avoid being 'tormented in [the] flame' (Luke 16. 24).[527]

2. The Avaricious Prince Scene and its Analogues

The avaricious prince scene is conventional in a number of ways and shares certain parallels with other texts in contemporaneous cultural circulation. It might be noted from the outset that the avaricious prince episode is not the only instance in the *Gilte Legende* in which Magdalene appears as admonitory visitant to a sinner in a stage associated with sleep. The text relates that Magdalene appeared (though in this instance after her death) to a 'clerke of Flaundres that hight Steven' who had fallen 'in so gret wrechidnesse that he haunted all

[526] Elsewhere and in an original passage in the Digby play, the king of Marseilles actually threatens that he will remove Magdalene's tongue: 'But þou make me answer son, I xall þe frett, / And cut þe tong owt of þi hed!' (ll. 1528-9). Although the Digby play is staged much later, this comment (particularly since it follows a lengthy sermon preached by Magdalene) is particularly noteworthy since Emperor Frederick II (d. 1250) used to apply this punishment to heretics. See Barber, *The Two Cities*, pp. 189-90.

[527] Note the imagery of flames in the account of Mary Magdalene appearing with 'brynnyng chere / As alle þe hous had been afere' (ll. 5832-3).

maner of synnes'. On this occasion when Steven 'visited [Magdalene's] tombe, betwene slepinge and wakingge', Magdalene is described as appearing to him in the 'lyknesse of a faire woman susteined with two aungeles' and calls on him to repent.[528] Just as the sinful woman in the *Gesta Romanorum* elects to do penance after 'seynte marie Magdalene [appears to her] in here slepe', Steven takes up a 'right perfit lyff' after being encouraged to do so by the deceased saint (p. 480).[529]

The Virgin presents a second example of a Mary who appears as a sublime and terrifying dream visitant. The Old French *Miracles of the Virgin Mary* by Gautier de Coincy (b. 1177/8) contains the narrative account of the Virgin's nocturnal appearance to a wrongful clerk as he lies in bed with his wife. The legend relates that the clerk had seen a statue of the Virgin Mary and having never seen a woman 'as pleasing and beautiful' to him gave her his lover's ring and pledged never to 'have another girlfriend or wife'.[530] Over time, however, the clerk forgets his promise and marries his earlier lover. On the first night that they are married, the couple lie together in 'a bed beautifully prepared in a handsome bedchamber'. The couple do not consummate their marriage but as soon as the clerk falls asleep, the Virgin appears to him and chastizes him for not having 'acted in the right way' and for being unfaithful. When the clerk wakes up, he believes that he has 'been fooled' by the vision and goes back to sleep. The Virgin appears to him again and this time she appears 'very proud […], frightening, fierce, and disdainful'.[531] Just as Magdalene refers to the prince's wife as 'the serpent' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472), this Mary tells the sleeping clerk:

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[528] It is questionable whether Magdalene should be understood as a ghost at this point, an apparition, or a spirit occupying the material body of a living woman. While the figure of Father Abraham in Luke, discussing the geography of the different 'afterworlds' occupied by Lazarus and the rich man, tells the rich man that 'there is a great gulf fixed between us and you, so that there is no passing from our side of it to you, no crossing over to us from yours' (16. 26), Magdalene seems to cross easily from the world of the dead to the world of the living. The reference to Steven having 'haunted' all manner of sins (p. 480) is interesting because it corresponds with this idea of Magdalene as some kind of restless spirit.

[529] *The Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, p. 394.

[530] Gautier de Coincy, 'Miracles of the Virgin Mary', trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, in *Medieval Hagiography: an anthology*, ed. Head, pp. 627-54 (pp. 631-53), p. 636.

[531] Gautier de Coincy, 'Miracles of the Virgin Mary', p. 637.

> The demons possessed and blinded you […] when for your miserable wife you renounced and repudiated me. If you fill yourself with the stinking stink of this stinking woman you will find yourself stinking at the bottom of Hell.[532]

The clerk is so afraid that if he touches his wife 'just a little bit he [will] perish and die' that he takes up the life of a monk.[533] As in the avaricious prince scene, the outcome of the dream vision is that the male sleeper elects to turn away from, or renounce, that aspect of his life deemed sinful.

Closer to the episode in the Magdalene legend, the *Awntyrs off Arthur* (ca. 1400), an analogue, describes the ghost of Guinevere's mother appearing to the queen and Gawain and delivering a speech on 'the transitoriness of life and beauty', which also draws attention to the plight of the poor 'at the yete'.[534] In her criticisms of 'Pride with the appurtenaunce', she calls on her daughter to '[h]ave pité on the poer – thou art of power' and says that in God's eyes 'charité is chef'.[535] In the same way that the Magdalene of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* advises the couple that they stand 'in a ful perlyous caas, / And art lykly to cryin eueremore allaas' (ll. 5860-1), Guinevere's mother provides Gawain and Guinevere with 'a warning', just as the rich man asked of Abraham in Luke 16. 28. Unlike Magdalene who is still alive when she enters into the dreams of the sleepers, Guinevere's mother is described as 'a messenger […] from the dead' (Luke 16. 30) and is able to speak from a position of hindsight. Referring to how she herself once surpassed the queen in her 'garson and golde', 'catelles', and 'contreyes', she presents her current reality in terms of being '[n]axte and nedefull, naked on night'.[536] God has punished her for luxury and lack of charity as Magdalene threatens he will punish the pleasure-loving rulers of Marseilles. In both

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[532] Gautier de Coincy, 'Miracles of the Virgin Mary', pp. 637-8.
[533] Gautier de Coincy, 'Miracles of the Virgin Mary', p. 638.
[534] Andrew Joynes, *Medieval Ghost Stories: An Anthology of Miracles, Marvels and Prodigies*, ed. Joynes (Woodbridge; Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 2001), p. 142. Thomas Hahn (ed.), *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 178-201, l. 179.
[535] *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, l. 239, 1. 173, and 1. 252.
[536] *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, l. 147, 1. 150, l. 150, and l. 185.

narratives being absorbed in earthly pleasures is represented as an example of wrongdoing, but there is also a social message about giving wealth away to the poor.

The specific content of Magdalene's sermon finds a number of parallels in medieval social criticism. In his *Chronicles*, Jean Froissart (1337-1405) describes the preaching of 'a crack-brained priest of Kent called John Ball' (ca. 1338-81).[537] Froissart's polemical account relates that Ball used to preach on Sundays after mass that 'things cannot go right in England […] until goods are held in common and there are no more villeins and gentlefolk'.[538] In the course of his preaching, Froissart relates (whether or not entirely accurately) that Ball used to draw attention to the difference between the rich and the poor, saying:

> They are clad in velvet and camlet lined with squirrel and ermine, while we go dressed in coarse cloth. They have the wines, the spices and the good bread: we have the rye, the husks, and the straw, and we drink water. They have shelter and ease in their fine manors, and we have the hardship and toil, the wind and the rain in the fields. And from us must come, from our labour, the things which keep them in luxury.[539]

S. H. Rigby argues in his 1995 study that this passage, which culminates in Ball's advocacy of reform or even rebellion, demonstrates a 'progression from criticising the abuses of the rich and powerful to an attack on the social order itself'. [540] Although Ball is reported as going considerably further in his speech than Magdalene and the passage includes the complaint that it is lower-class labour that creates upper-class luxury, the sorts of complaints being made are quite similar and build on a tradition of preachers castigating the rich for unthinking, uncharitable, enjoyment of luxury. Just as Ball contrasts the clothing, food and property (or lack thereof) enjoyed or endured by the two different social groups, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* also represents Magdalene as commenting on the couples' 'clothys of sylk & gold' (l. 5851), 'dyuers metys' (l. 5845) and 'statly paleys' (l. 5850).[541]

[537] Jean Froissart, *Chronicles / Froissart,* trans. and ed. Geoffrey Brereton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 212.
[538] Ball, cited in Froissart, *Chronicles / Froissart*, p. 212.
[539] Ball, cited in Froissart, *Chronicles / Froissart*, p. 212.
[540] Rigby, *English society in the later Middle Ages*, p. 315.
[541] Note that clothes of silk and gold could be interpreted as clothing for the body (nightwear) or bedclothes (sheets) since the couple are described as being wrapped in these items.

Behind Ball lies a tradition of criticism voiced by the Church itself against pride and materialist luxury. In his influential *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* G. R. Owst provides extensive commentary on the 'continuous stream of scorn and reproof for all the current sources of pride and prestige in medieval society [which] poured forth from the pulpits'.[542] Owst examines the widespread criticisms of the '"avaricious laymen and clerks"' who:

> possess so much wealth that it rots in their coffers; and when they see Christ's poor dying of hunger are unwilling to disperse anything to them from their riches. Likewise, they have so many pairs of clothes hanging on their perches, that often the latter are devoured by moths. And yet they will not give one pair of clothes to Christ's poor when they behold them dying of cold in the winter.[543]

While Owst's study concentrates mainly on surveying the scathing invective composed by preachers including Dominican John Bromyard (d. ca. 1352) and Franciscan Nicholas Bozon (author of *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*), didactic, non-sermon literature such as Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* (1303) also provided strongly-worded criticism of the uncharitable or directly oppressive rich.[544] After retelling the parable of *Dives and Lazarus*, the narrator of this text exclaims:

> Lorde! how shul þese robbers fare,
> Þat þe pore pepyl pelyn ful bare,
> Erlës, kny3tës, and barouns,
> And ouþer lordyngës of tounnes,
> Iustyses, shryues, and baylyuys,
> Þat þe lawës alle to-ryues,
> And þe pore men alle to-pyle;
> To ryche men do þey but as þey wylle.[545]

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[542]Owst, *Literature and Pulpit,* p. 236.
[543] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p. 303. Though Owst does not refer to the author, the text can be found in MS. Add. 21253, fol. 105.
[544] Bozon's account of the avaricious prince scene takes the same general line on the saint's criticism of the rich as the Middle English versions, though his Magdalene says to the lady: 'E vus avez trop de richesce' ['And you have too much wealth'] (l. 163). Rather than saying that the couple in 'rychesse habounde' (l. 5816), as Bokenham's Magdalene does, Bozon's Magdalene provides the charge of *too much* wealth. This subtle distinction is important because it demonstrates further the admonishment of the wealthy and uncharitable.
[545] Robert of Brunne, "*Handlyng Synne", A. D. 1303: with those parts of the Anglo-Norman Treatise on which it was founded, William of Wadington's "Manuel des Pechiez"*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS O. S. 119 and 123 (London: Trübner, 1901), I and II. 6789-96.

The treatment in *Handlyng Synne* of the Lukan parable presents the idea that God was most angry neither at the rich man's 'glotonye' nor at his 'auaryce', but at the fact that he 'dyd þe pore man loþ'.[546] Similarly in the Magdalene legend, the couples' greatest sin is that they see 'goddys seruantys' (*Legendys*, l. 5847) perishing with 'hunger & myschef beforn þine eye' (l. 5848), but that they have neither 'reuthe [compassion] ner pyte' for their plight (l. 5855).

It is implied that preoccupation with material goods has distracted the couple from doing their duty to the poor, and a similar set of ideas can be found in the early-fourteenth-century Latin text entitled by its modern editor the *Song on the Venality of the Judges* [*Beati qui esuriunt*]. In this text, the narrator begins by quoting from the Beatitudes (especially Matthew 5. 6) and moves on from the ideas there of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, to preach against the rich and powerful who have no concern either for true justice or the plight of the poor:

> Blessed are they who hunger and thirst, and do justice, and hate and avoid the wickedness of injustice; whom neither abundance of gold nor the jewels of the rich draw from the inflexibility, or from the cry of the poor.[547]

Having set out the ideal, the text launches into a complaint that 'the age deceives many in a wonderful manner' and that the 'cause of this is money, to which almost every court has now wedded itself'.[548] After describing the corrupt monetary practices that take place in the law-court, the tract criticizes corrupt sheriffs and their clerks who benefit from oppressive economic practices. The narrator caustically notes:

> I laugh at [the] clerks, whom I see at first indigent enough, and possessing next to nothing, when they receive a bailiwick; which received they next show themselves proud, and their teeth grow. Holding up their necks they begin very hastily to buy lands and houses, and agreeable rents; amassing money themselves, they despise the poor and make new laws, oppressing their neighbours.[549]

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[546] Robert of Brunne, "*Handlyng Synne", A. D. 1303*, l. 6773, l. 6774 and l. 6778.
[547] Thomas Wright (trans.), *Song on the Venality of the Judges*, in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. James M. Dean, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publishers, 1996), pp. 191-2, p. 191.
[548] *Song on the Venality of the Judges*, p. 191.
[549] *Song on the Venality of the Judges*, p. 192.

While the prince and princess of Marseilles in the Magdalene narratives are not described as actively mistreating the poor, for personal gain, in precisely the same way as the villainous figures depicted in this text, their sin, like that of the rich man from the Lukan parable of *Dives and Lazarus*, is one of inaction through lack of care and compassion.

That the Magdalene's sermon takes place in the bedroom seems not to be coincidental. Much literature on the follies of the uncharitable rich and powerful provides comment on beds and bedding.[550] Stephen Greenblatt in his discussion of the soliloquy in *2 Henry IV* on the 'perfum'd chambers of the great' argues that '[w]e are invited to […] accept the grotesque and cruelly unequal distribution of possessions: everything to the few, nothing to the many'.[551] Whereas Greenblatt finds in the king's words the justification that the wealthy 'earn, or at least pay for, their exalted position through suffering' (a conservative model that legitimizes differences in social and economic statuses), medieval social criticism often employs images of beds and bedding to bring to light, and even denounce, the 'grotesque and cruelly unequal distribution of possessions'.[552] Owst relates the 'old sermon-story' of a 'luxurious student at Bologna' who was converted by being told to 'reflect on how hard would be the beds in Hell'.[553] This allusion to beds in relation to the misdemeanours of the mean-spirited rich is not an isolated instance; in another example from Owst's study, reference is made to the 'beds of the proud' given mention in 'Hester, ii' [*Esther*]. In these beds, which are 'reprehensible' as a result of 'the softness of the quilts, the costliness of the coverlets and [their] great size', the 'Devil too [is said to] lie comfortably with' the

[550] As I discuss below, Owst has provided some discussion of beds in literature on the proud. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp. 411-13.
[551] Greenblatt, 'Invisible bullets', in *Political Shakespeare*, p. 40 and pp. 40-1. See *The Second Part of Henry IV*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 1333-1405, III.i.9-14: 'Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs ['hovels'], / Upon uneasy pallets ['hard straw beds'] stretching thee, / And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber, / Than in the perfumed chambers of the great, / Under the canopies of costly state, And lulled with the sound of sweetest melody?'
[552] Greenblatt, 'Invisible bullets', in *Political Shakespeare*, p. 41 and pp. 40-1.
[553] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p. 413. Owst attributes this tale to *Spec. Laic.* cap. Lxxxv.

sleepers.[554] The prince and his wife who lie in their palace 'wrapped in silken sheets' (*Legenda aurea*, p. 377) are presented as equally guilty of displaying pride in worldly goods.

Those examples provided above are just a small number of instances in which literature on the poverty and privilege theme employs images of beds and bedding as part of a broader social comment.[555] As well as the aforementioned Wycliffite tract 'The Order of the Priesthood', in which the narrator criticizes priests for indulging 'mete & drynk of þe beste & riche cloþis & softe beddis', Chaucer's 'The Former Age' (ca. 1380s) describes a lost Golden Age in which there was no need for 'doun of fetheres' or 'bleched shete'.[556] After providing discussion of a time where '[t]her lay no profit, ther was no richesse', the text relates:

> In caves and wodes softe and swete
> Slepten this blessed folke witheoute walles
> On gras or leves in parfit quiete.
> Ne doun of fetheres ne no bleched shete
> Was kid to hem, but in seurtee they slepte.
> Hir hertes were al oon witheoute galles;
> Everich of hem his feith to other kepte.[557]

The ideas in this section of the poem seem to correspond with the notion that the 'poor man in his hut, wealthy in conscience, sleeps safer upon earth than the rich man in his gold and purple'.[558]

Despite being relatively overlooked in recent criticism, the avaricious prince scene belongs to a wider tradition of medieval, and indeed post-medieval, literature on themes pertaining to the rightful uses of wealth. It is both reflective and constitutive of those contemporaneous writings which criticize a materialistic lifestyle and / or provide comment

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[554] Amos vi, 4) MS. Add. 21253, fol. 162, cited in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p. 413.
[555] Although not employed for social comment, compare the description in the *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* of how Martha (a figure associated with poverty) slept on 'tree branches and brushwood, and she placed a stone beneath her for a pillow' (p. 102).
[556] Wyclif (?), 'The Order of Priesthood', p. 170. Chaucer, 'The Former Age', l. 45.
[557] Chaucer, 'The Former Age', l. 26 and ll. 42-8.
[558] Owst refers to how the Cistercian Odo of Cheriton cited this passage from Ambrose in a homily on the Lukan parable of *Dives and Lazarus*. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p. 571.

on the duties of the rich towards the poor. It is also, of course, another aspect of Magdalene's medieval *vita* in which the protagonist is presented in conflict with figures of authority.

3. The Dream Appearances to the Wife Alone

An important question coming out of the avaricious prince scene seems to be: why does Magdalene appear on the first two nights to the wife alone rather than visiting both spouses as they (presumably) lie in bed together? Both the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende* are in accordance that Magdalene appeared to the lady and 'manaced her gretly that but yef she wolde stere her husbond to refresshe the pore seruauntes of oure Lorde she shulde repent her' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 471). Rather than going to the prince directly, the princess is given the responsibility (a responsibility that she fails to fulfil) of telling her husband about the sufferings of the poor Christians and of convincing him to act in a way that is considered charitable and just. Unlike in the Digby play in which Magdalene appears to both the king and queen together and, as Findon has noted, directs only one line to the queen ('"and thow, qwen, tvrne from þi good!" (1617)'), the version of events in these two narrative accounts (following on from the tradition found in the *Legenda aurea*) represents two preliminary appearances to the princess on her own.[559] Below is suggested a number of different contexts for the appearance to the lady alone.

The gospel of Matthew provides an important source for the tradition of advisory dream visions to women. While perhaps not as well as known as the account earlier in the gospel of how 'an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said, Rise up, take with thee the child [Christ] and his mother and flee to Egypt' (2. 13), a dream that serves to save Christ from being slain along with the other male children born in Bethlehem, Matthew also tells of

[559] Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 174. Although the Digby Magdalene directs only one line to the queen, Findon comments that 'it is the [q]ueen who immediately understands Mary's words as a request for charity for all those in need, rather than herself alone' and that this royal figure 'sees that the vision calls for action, and she explains what they need to do ("that we xuld help þem þat haue nede" 1631); she thus becomes the force behind the action required' (pp. 174, 175).

a dream visitation to Pilate's wife. This narrative, one which is given literary treatment in N-Town's *Satan and Pilate's Wife; The Second Trial before Pilate* (ca. 1468), relates that:

> Pilate asked [the people], whom shall I release? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? He knew well that they had only given him up out of malice; and even as he sat on the judgement-seat, his wife had sent him a message, Do not meddle with this innocent man; I dreamed to-day that I suffered much on his account. (Matthew 27. 17-19).[560]

Pilate's wife is not the only woman to receive wisdom in a dream. The *Legenda aurea* provides the account of an advisory dream vision to a wife alone as she lies in bed with her husband. Whereas Magdalene's appearance to the princess shares some parallels with the 'oracular' dream in which 'a parent, or a pious or revered man, or even a priest or god clearly reveals what will transpire, and what action to take or avoid' (Magdalene does not exactly elaborate on what 'will transpire', but she is quite clear about 'what action' the lady must take), this *Legenda aurea* account describes a 'prophetic' post-coital dream received by Judas' mother.[561] Here the narrator refers to the tradition found in 'a certain admittedly apocryphal history' that:

> One night after [Judas' parents] had paid each other the marital debt, Cyborea fell asleep and had a dream that she related, terrified, sobbing and groaning, to her husband. She said: 'I dreamed that I was going to bear a son so wicked that he would bring ruin on our whole people.' Ruben answered: 'That's a very bad thing you are saying, a thing that should not be repeated, and I think a divining spirit has hold of you!' 'If I find that I have conceived and if I bear a son,' she said, 'there can be no doubt that it was not a divining spirit but a revelation of the truth'.[562]

Although a Freudian reading would no doubt make much of the fact that this distressing dream follows sexual activity (particularly given the later account of Judas' inadvertent

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[560] N-Town, *Satan and Pilate's Wife; The Second Trial before Pilate*, in *The N-Town Play*, I. 314-23. In the account in this play, Pilate's wife says to her husband: '"Pylat, I charge þe þat þu take hede: / Deme not Jesu, but be his frende. / 3yf bu jewge hym to be dede, / þu art dampnyd withowtyn ende"' (ll. 58-62). After Pilate has heard his wife tell of the 'fend' (l. 62) that appeared to her as she 'lay in [her] bed slepyng fast' (l. 63), he acknowledges that her 'cowncel is good' (l. 75).

[561] See Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*, in *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl, Records of Civilization. Sources and Studies; 48 (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 81-246, p. 90.

[562] *Saint Matthias, Apostle*, p. 167.

incestuous marriage to Cyborea), the point is that the visitation occurs to Cyborea alone.[563] Like Pilate's wife and the princess in the avaricious prince scene, Judas' mother is privy to knowledge denied to her husband.

While the examples above suggest that there is a tradition of advisory (and trustworthy) dream visitations to women, there is a second possible context for the account of Magdalene's appearances to the princess alone.[564] In her essay 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives' (1986), Sharon Farmer discusses Thomas of Chobham's (ca. 1160 – 1233 / 36) argument in *Manual for Confessors* (ca. 1215) that 'women should employ persuasion, feminine enticements, and even deceit in their attempts to influence and correct the moral and economic behaviour of their husbands'.[565] In this text, Thomas writes that:

> In imposing penance, it should always be enjoined upon women to be preachers to their husbands, because no priest is able to soften the heart of a man the way his wife can. […] *Even in the bedroom*, in the midst of their embraces, a wife should speak alluringly to her husband, and if he is hard and unmerciful, and an oppressor of the poor, she should invite him to be merciful; if he is a plunderer she should denounce plundering; if he is avaricious, she should arouse generosity in him, and she should secretly give alms from their common property, supplying the alms that he omits. [my emphasis].[566]

Farmer has provided a number of interesting insights into the extract and its theme (she argues, for example, that the stress on wives using 'speech and sexual enticements to manipulate men' shares parallels with contemporaneous representations of the way Eve

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[563] In light of Marijane Osborn's 1998 description of the common motif of the 'woman adrift in flight from incest', it is interesting that the account of Judas' life combines treatment of his being 'set afloat in the sea' by his parents and the foundling later taking his biological 'mother [Cyborea] to wife'. Marijane Osborn (trans. and ed.), *Romancing the Goddess: three Middle English romances about women*, with a critical commentary by Osborn (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. ix. Jacobus de Voragine, *Saint Matthias, Apostle*, p. 167 and p. 168.

[564] It is important to note that both Pilate's wife and Judas' mother are right to trust in the wisdom that is imparted to them in their dreams. This issue is discussed further below.

[565] Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives', *Speculum* 61.3 (1986), 517-43 (p. 517).

[566] Thomas of Chobham, cited in Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices', 517. Karen Winstead has also referred to this quotation in relation to medieval hagiography, arguing that '[l]ike the writings that Farmer discusses, the virgin martyr legends of the *North English Legendary* extol women who play an aggressive role in almsgiving; indeed, they go so far as to present unilateral acts of charity as heroic. Yet the virgin martyrs do not present Cobham's [sic] concern for the spiritual well-being of the men they defy'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, p. 82.

'compelled Adam "to obey her voice rather than the word of God"') and these are relevant to an understanding of the avaricious prince scene.[567] Applying Thomas' logic to this narrative episode, it might be suggested that Magdalene appeals to the wife first since she anticipates that this figure will be able to 'soften the heart' of her husband in a way that she cannot.[568] Indeed, the princess of the *Gilte Legende* is later shown to 'stere her husbond' (p. 471) – and to be very successful in this task. When the prince tells the lady that he intends to go on his pilgrimage alone, the narrator notes that she 'stroue as a woman and wolde not chaunge her womanly maners and felle doune on her knees to his fete we|pinge, and atte the laste he graunted hir her request' (p. 473): she employs those very tactics that Thomas of Chobham would advocate. Similarly to Dalila, she is willing to use 'all [her] arts' (*Judges* 16. 5) to achieve what she desires.[569]

While Farmer discusses the association in writings including *The Manual for Confessors* between 'morally persuasive wives and avaricious or usurious husbands', a number of medieval texts more generally advocate charitable behaviour in women (the sort of behaviour that Magdalene expects the princess to encourage in her husband).[570] In *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, the narrator holds up charity as an ideal for medieval females, saying that:

> euery good woman ought to be charytable / as the holy lady [the Virgin] was / that gaf for the loue of god and ful charyte the moste parte that she had / And at thexample of her dyd saynt Elyzabeth / saynte Lucye / saynt Cecylle and many other holy ladyes / whiche were so charitable that they gaf to the poure & Indygent the most parte of theyr reuenues.[571]

Though Magdalene does not ask the princess to encourage her husband to give to the poor Christians 'the most parte of theyr reuenues' – she asks only that the wife 'meue / Hyr

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[567] Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices', p. 539.
[568] Thomas of Chobham, cited in Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices', p. 517.
[569] Elsewhere in the *Gilte Legende* the preaching Magdalene is herself represented as benefitting from 'feminine arts' since the narrator comments that the people stopped worshipping the idols and 'alle hadde gret meruayle of the beauute and of the reson that was in her and of her faire spekinge' (p. 471).
[570] Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices', p. 535.
[571] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 147.

husbonde þere myschef to releue' (ll. *Legendys*, 5820-1) – it might be argued that she calls upon the princess to show the same charitable impulses that is endorsed in conduct literature for women. Indeed, the 'goode wife' of the fourteenth-century conduct narrative *How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter* also advises her daughter:

> Of pore men be thou not lothe,
> Bot gyff thou them both mete and clothe;
> And to pore folke be thou not herde;
> Bot be to them thyn owen stowarde.[572]

Although charity is only one of many female virtues advocated in those texts above, the point is that Magdalene's appearance to the wife alone allows her the opportunity to act in a way considered exemplary in women. The protagonist does not go as far as Thomas of Chobham in asking the princess to 'secretly give alms from their common property' (Winstead says that the *North English Legendary*'s Anastasia did something similar), but merely asks that she tell her husband of the vision and 'stere' him 'for to refresshe the pore seruauntes of oure Lorde' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 471).[573] Given that Magdalene is herself associated in some medieval sermons with the 'corporal works of mercy', it is fitting that she calls upon the lady to perform these same duties expected of medieval Christians (though note that at this point the couple are pagan and according to the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* worship 'dyane', l. 5803).[574]

There is a further level to all this and it must be acknowledged (as noted earlier in the thesis) that Bokenham is writing for a number of women with power and influence. Since the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* is a collection of female saints' lives and would have had a

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[572] Eve Salisbury (ed.), *How The Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter*, in *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 219-24, ll. 13-16.

[573] Thomas of Chobham, in Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices, p. 517. See Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, p. 79, on how Anastasia 'deceives her husband by stealing out late at night and distributing his goods among the poor'.

[574] In her discussion of Magdalene's broader association with the Church's doctrine of the 'works of mercy', Jansen cites an Easter sermon by Innocent III that establishes 'the motif of the active Magdalen' and relates that: 'The laity [Mary Magdalene] ought to buy the six types of fragrance for anointing him. They are the six works of piety which Christ will commend according to the [last] Judgement when he says to those standing at his right side: "I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you quenched my thirst; I was a stranger and you gave me hospitality; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was imprisoned and you came to me" (Matt 25: 33-36)'. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 108.

primarily female readership, it is perhaps unsurprising that women are represented as having the authority, but also the responsibility, of assisting in decisions about the running of the household and use of wealth and funds. That Magdalene gives the princess an active role in procuring a better standard of living for the poor Christians is important since the text seems to provide an example (or *exemplum*) for those noble women reading the narrative: women who would possess the financial means, education, and influence to play a more active role in assisting the poor of their communities.

This emphasis on women's influence and authority (over their husbands, as well as in the broader community) is also relevant in light of recent work on medieval queens and their power. In a chapter aptly entitled 'Never Better Ruled By Any Man', Marty Williams and Anne Echols provide a number of accounts of late-medieval female monarchs who act as regents or who play significant roles in the governance of their husband's kingdoms. Some of these women (for example, fourteenth-century queen Philippa of Hainault, b. 1314) are described as being involved in charitable work and others (such as Adelaide of Maurienne, 1092-1154, in the twelfth century) are described as assisting in policy making on behalf of their less competent male counterparts.[575] Queen Margaret of Denmark, a figure who came to power in 1375, is even referred to as 'protecting peasant freeholders from avaricious nobles': she takes up the role of protectoress of the poor in the face of oppression.[576] Read against this context, the princess, as she is represented in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende*, might be understood as having been afforded the opportunity to act in the exemplary manner of her royal 'sisters'. The narrative account of Magdalene's appearance to the lady alone seems to correspond with a historical 'reality' in which a number of medieval queens were coming to possess the influence and power to

[575] See Marty Williams and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994), pp. 183-95 (especially p. 186 and p. 187).
[576] Williams and Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal*, p. 194.

‘meue’ their husbands (*Legendys*, l. 5820) in domestic issues and in the governance of their realms.

Part Three: The Avaricious Prince Scene and Political ‘Realms of Possibility’

1. Questions and Questioning

The last chapter discussed the questions and gaps in the text pertaining to religious authority and a number of questions also come out of the avaricious prince scene. While the second and third sections consider the implications of the scene’s essential overdeterminacy for women and non-wealthy, non-*gentil*, non-powerful factions of late-medieval English society, this first section considers some of the broader questions raised by the narrative – such as what is the basis for Magdalene’s authority as a social critic figure? Is a vision from a dream to be trusted?

The avaricious prince episode might be understood as an interrogative one and this is further suggested in the legend by the four questions that Magdalene asks the couple on the three consecutive nights. First, she asks the lady why it is that she and her husband ‘in rychesse habounde’ (l. 5816) when the Christians languish in ‘hungyr & colde’ (l. 5817); second, she asks the prince if he is ‘a-slepe’ (l. 5836); third, she queries why the couple allow the Christians to suffer ‘[w]yth hunger & myschef’ (l. 5848) when they lead a luxurious existence; and fourth she questions whether the couple think that they will ‘askapyn fre / And peynlees for þis greth trespaas’ (ll. 5857-8). With the exception of the enquiry regarding the prince’s stage of sleep (he is presumably in the liminal state between sleep and wakefulness), the other questions all have a moral basis and are perhaps directed as much towards the

gentil, affluent reader outside the text as the couple in the text.[577]

It is interesting that Magdalene chooses to appeal to the couple as they lie in bed sleeping. Thomas Robinson's *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1621) describes the 'prick of conscience' in terms of the 'silly [sorry] soule amaz'd, beginn[ing] to starte, / As one awaked from his nightly rest, / With slumber soft, and hopefull dreames possest' (ll. 513-15). Given that Magdalene's third visitation does result in the couple modifying their behaviour towards the poor Christians (if not demonstrating a broader moral transformation), the image of the couple waking from sleep might be considered an appropriate one.[578] Indeed, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* refers to how '[s]odeynly oute of hyr slepe [the lady] abreyd' (l. 5866), the use of the term 'abreyd' (defined in the glossary to Bokenham as 'to start out of a swoon') verbally reminiscent of the picture found in the *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* of the 'silly soule' beginning to 'starte' from sleep (l. 513).

Despite this possible context for representing the visitation as occurring when the couple are sleeping, medieval readers and audiences would likely be familiar with contemporaneous debates as to whether dreams counted as veritable modes of authority and

[577] Findon, discussing an episode original to the Digby play in which Magdalene is sleeping in the arbour and receives a visitation prompting her conversion, describes sleep as 'a kind of liminal realm between life and death' and thereby a 'suitably evocative trigger for Mary's encounter with a divine messenger'. Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 168. That the prince might be on the borders of sleep and wakefulness is interesting given Macrobius' discussion of the 'apparition (*phantasma* or *visum*)' that comes to a person in the '"first cloud of sleep"'. Indeed, Macrobius refers to how in a person's 'drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees spectres rushing at him or wandering vaguely around, differing from normal creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing. To this class belongs the incubus, which, according to popular belief, rushes upon people in their sleep and presses them with a weight which they can feel'. Macrobius, *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*, p. 89. While Magdalene is certainly no incubus, the bedding setting shares links with traditions about the carnal nature of those nightly visitations and the weight she presses is a moral, rather than sexual, one.

[578] Compare Coletti on how the Digby couple have 'absorbed a lesson about corporal works of mercy'. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 361.

could be trusted.[579] While Pilate's wife and Judas' mother are shown to be sensible in placing faith in advice received from dreams, there is not shared consensus as to whether dreams are reliable. Macrobius (b. ca. 360), for example, agrees with Virgil that nightmares can be regarded 'deceitful' and argues that the term '*insomnium*' refers to the fact that these dreams are 'noteworthy only during their course and afterwards have no importance or meaning'.[580] Similarly, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* (ca. 1390s), which does ultimately suggest that Chauntecleer would have been right to listen to the warning received in his dream, presents some of the arguments for not reading too much into wisdom imparted during sleep. The text describes Pertelote as repeating Cato's advice 'Ne do no fors of dremes' and as reproducing arguments that bad dreams are caused by 'repleccioun's' [overeating].[581] Although Bokenham's prince and princess might be understood as guilty of gluttony (Magdalene chastises them for their luxurious diet and this could contribute to them experiencing distressing dreams), there is nothing else in the scene to imply that the royal couple would be correct to ignore the advice that they receive during slumber. Nevertheless, the arguments attributed to Pertelote in the Chaucer narrative serve as a reminder of taking too seriously those warnings received when a person is quite literally 'in another world'. The texts do not make it apparent why Magdalene does not appear to the couple in daylight hours and convince them through rational argument to assist destitute Christians. Aside from the possible 'prick of conscience' subtext, it is not clear why the three visitations occur when the prince and princess are sleeping and why Magdalene cannot wait until the couple are both awake.

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[579] For further discussion of this issue, see Steven F. Kruger's *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. In this study, Kruger describes the tensions between late-medieval writers who, on the one hand, 'saw dreams as dangerous, associated with pagan practices and demonic seduction', and, on the other, 'claimed that dreams could be divinely inspired and foretell the future'. One of the sources for this indeterminacy lies in the Bible, which 'validates the use of dreams as predictive tools' and yet also 'lends its authority to a distrust of dreams, at certain points strongly condemning the practice of dream divination'. Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7.
[580] Macrobius, *Commentary on Scipio's Dream*, p. 89.
[581] Chaucer, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, pp. 253-61, l. 2941 and l. 2923.

Just as the question is raised as to why Magdalene appears in a dream (and, following on from this, whether dreams can be trusted), it must also be asked what the justification is for Magdalene's nocturnal teaching and preaching. Though the *Gilte Legende* suggests that Magdalene's proficiency as a public preacher can be attributed in part to her close relationship with Jesus since 'it was no wonder' that 'the mouth that so debonairly and so goodly had kussed the fete of oure Lorde [was] more enspired withe the worde of Godde thanne other' (p. 471), she does not 'preche Ihesu Crist' in her visitations to the couple (p. 471) but admonishes them for their moral wrongdoing. Her message is not one of faith or conversion, but ethical social instruction. That Magdalene in her role as public preacher should be understood as an authority on Christ can be explained by a reading of the texts since she has already been shown to be First Witness of the Resurrection and, according to the Bokenham narrative, his closest follower. Magdalene's earlier relationship with Christ, though, does not seem to bestow on her the authority to preach on socio-economic themes (even if biblical accounts such as Matthew 19. 21 do describe Jesus as advocating providing for the poor): there is no obvious correlation between experiencing the mystery of the Resurrection and being an authority on social ills such as avarice. As will be discussed later, it is not entirely clear if Magdalene of this scene should be understood as an exemplary moral guide or as something of an interfering busybody (the nuisance woman of medieval antifeminist tradition). Her counter-heroic actions in confronting socio-economic inequalities might also be considered in less positive terms.

Developing further this question of authority, it is worth noting that, unlike in her posthumous appearance to the wicked clerk Steven, Magdalene is still alive when she appears to the couple to warn them about the follies of their luxurious and uncharitable lifestyles. This distinction is important, since Magdalene is technically still an ordinary human being at this point in the text (if one with extraordinary or superhuman powers): she has not yet made the

transition into a saint.[582] In Michèle Roberts' *Impossible Saints* (1997), the narrator comments:

> A saint: is what I am not. A saint is: over there. Not here. A saint is invisible, I can't see her, she has run away out of sight, she hovers just ahead of me, the air trembles with her departure, she has gone and left me, she is the woman I want and whom I can't reach and can't find. She is a woman who is dead. A saint is absence. Always somewhere else, not here.[583]

Although in her nocturnal speech to the couple the Magdalene of the *Gilte Legende* refers to the poor Christians as 'seintes of God' (p. 472) and in a later discussion with the hermit priest calls Bishop Maximin 'Seint Maximian' (p. 477), a person is not usually granted saint status while he or she is still alive. Since Magdalene is technically just an exiled and destitute Christian woman at this point in the narrative chronology (even if in her speech to the couple this figure differentiates herself from the poor Christians by neither alluding to her own suffering nor using first-person pronouns, singular or plural), she does not possess the authority that comes from being canonized.

Moreover, and in keeping with this issue of authority, it is worth noting that the Magdalene of the opening lines is represented as a wealthy and powerful heiress. Although the *Gilte Legende*'s Magdalene sells her property after Christ's Ascension and distributes the money among the apostles, she is perhaps not the most obvious advocate of simple living (at least prior to her entrance into the wilderness). The *Gilte Legende* especially associates Magdalene's sin with 'richesse' and 'habundaunce of thingges' (p. 469): similarly to the couple she is suggested to display an inordinate attachment to worldly luxuries.

Though the texts do not make explicit the link between those transgressions displayed by the sinful Magdalene (herself a figure 'descended of reall [lingne], royal lineage, *Gilte Legende*, p. 469) and those displayed by the prince and princess, the later *Life and*

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[582] It is worth noting, however, that in her speech with the hermit priest, Bokenham's Magdalene identifies herself as the 'famous synnere' (l. 6222) of 'Luk' (l. 6223) and makes reference to (already) being known 'in þe gospel' (l. 6221).
[583] Michèle Roberts, *Impossible Saints* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), p. 273.

Repentance of Marie Magdalene (ca. 1550) presents the sinful Magdalene as guilty of abuses of wealth and power. Reading Magdalene's admonitory address through the lens of the Wager play (as well as the opening lines of the hagiographical accounts), the question is raised as to whether Magdalene of the narrative set piece should be understood as a legitimate authority on socio-economic themes.

Wager represents Magdalene herself as having little interest in social fairness, being educated by Pride to '[d]espise the poore, as wretches of an other kynde' (l. 527). Further, in a dramatic set piece unique to this play, Magdalene is tempted by the vice of Cupiditi to:

> Oppresse your tenantes, take fines, and raise rentes;
> Hold vp your houses and lands with their contents;
> Bye by great measure, and sell by small measure;
> This is a way to amplifie your treasure:
> Sell your ware for double more than it is worth;
> Though it be starke nought, yet put it forth.
> A thousand castes ['tricks'] to enriche you I can tell,
> If you be content to vse alway my counsell.
> (ll. 729-36).

While not actually staging Magdalene oppressing her tenants, the play provides dramatic treatment of her response to this suggestion.[584] Rather than chastising Cupiditi (a term meaning '[i]nordinate desire to appropriate wealth or possessions; greed of gain') for suggesting that she exploit her position and acquire greater wealth by mistreating those less fortunate herself, she replies: 'Yes, by the faith of my body, els I were not wise,/ For my profite is your counsell and deuise' (ll. 737-8).[585] Given that Wager later interprets the sinful Magdalene, a figure who also features in the Middle English *vitae*, as a tyrant (the very term applied to the prince and princess of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and *Gilte Legende*), the protagonist's authority as a figure of social criticism seems to be built on somewhat shaky

[584]It is possible to trace in this conceptualization of the thievery of landlords some important sociological detail. The Early Modern period was characterized by anxieties over landlord-tenant relations. John Taylor (1621) wrote, for example, of the country lord who 'Ignobly did oppresse / His Tenants, raising Rents to such excesse: / That they their states not able to maintain, / They turn'd starke beggers in a yeare or twaine'. John Taylor, cited in William C. Carroll, '"The Nursery of Beggary": Enclosure, Vagrancy, and Sedition in the Tudor-Stuart Period', in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 34-47, pp. 37.
[585] 'Cupidity, *n*' (meaning 2) > *OED* [accessed 17 August 2013].

foundations. Though Wager's Magdalene is not identical to the Magdalene of medieval hagiography, her association with materialism and luxurious living is also evident in the medieval texts.

The avaricious prince scene contains within it a number of questions. Like Chaucer's interrogative *Franklin's Tale* (ca. 1395), which closes on a note of enquiry ('Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?'), the narrative episode on Magdalene's visitations also generates a series of questions for its readers or audiences.[586] Below I shall provide a consideration of the implications of the episode for women and non-*gentil*, non-powerful members of medieval society, developing further those ideas of liminality and overdetermination introduced earlier in the chapter.

2. Return of the Repressed?

Picking up the feminist thread which runs throughout the thesis, this section focuses on the implications of the representations of Magdalene for the female subject outside the narrative. It suggests that Magdalene in her role as sublime and terrifying dream visitant can be read as an unruly female figure. The Magdalene of the avaricious prince scene, like the sinful Magdalene of the opening lines of the legend, can be read as the product of a misogynistic tradition but also as providing a positive model for the woman outside the text. She is simultaneously depicted as a courageous female figure who stands up to bad rulers and as a nagging nuisance woman. Though there are a number of important differences between Magdalene in her incarnation as 'the sinfull woman' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 469) and the figure represented in the avaricious prince scene, in both instances Magdalene can be understood to 'trouble' definitions of normative female behaviour and to behave in a way that can be

[586] Chaucer, *The Franklin's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 178-89, l. 1622.

considered defiant. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, surveying criticisms levied by figures including Geoffrey of Auxerre (d. ca. 1188) towards Waldensian women preachers, has argued that:

> Any preaching woman was cast as Jezebel, the quintessential representative of impurity and deceit. In contrast to the perfect model of Mary's purity and silence, Jezebel was the anti-model for defining norms of holy preaching and acceptable behavior for women.[587]

Though the Magdalene of the avaricious prince scene (a woman described earlier in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* as 'comoun', l. 5405) is not represented as the 'prostitute-preacher' of Kienzle's analysis, her lack of silence, married with her quarrelsome tone, means that she might be likened to some of the female stereotypes found in anti-feminist writings.[588]

On one level, Magdalene of the avaricious prince scene might be read as a figure of 'principled resistance to wrongful authority', a term that Stephen Knight has applied to Robin Hood (another important counter- figure).[589] While the association between these figures is interesting given that there is a medieval tradition concerned with Robin building a chapel in honour of Mary Magdalene, Knight's description of Robin might be applied to any one of a number of female saints.[590] Chapter two has discussed the different ways in which Cecilia and Magdalene can be understood as unruly women (Magdalene's unruliness is in part predicated on her problematic sexuality while Cecilia's lies partly in her militant virginity), but the avaricious prince episode collapses some of the differences between the women. Both saints are depicted as outspoken women who confront wrongful authority figures from a position of righteousness. Just as the *Gilte Legende*'s Cecilia employs rational argument when she stands up to 'tyraunt' Almachien, Magdalene is also represented as an eloquent speaker in her addresses to the 'tyraunth' of her narrative (*Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, l. 5859). The mode

[587] Kienzle, 'The Prostitute-Preacher', pp. 106-7.
[588] Kienzle, 'The Prostitute-Preacher', p. 99.
[589] Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. xi.
[590] In the final fitt of *A Gest of Robyn Hode* (ca. 1500?), Robin tells the king how he made a chapel in Barnsdale '[t]hat semely is to se, / It is of Mary Magdaleyne / And thereto wolde I be'. See Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren (eds), *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), pp. 90-148, ll. 1758-60.

of speech employed by the women differs since Cecilia argues in the manner of a lawyer (for example, in her statement 'Y shal preue anone that thou hast made a gret lesinge ayenst the comune trouthe') whereas Bokenham's Magdalene especially employs emotive language to describe the plight of suffering Christians.[591] Nevertheless, both female saints are conceptualized as similarly vocal on abuses of authority and thereby might be felt to provide positive models for the woman outside the narrative. They both counter dominant – and indeed immoral or wicked – hegemonic figures.

While the Magdalene of the avaricious prince scene is shown to be highly articulate in her criticisms of the abuses displayed by the royal couple, she is not the only female character to feature in this scene. The princess, unlike Magdalene, is not represented as an exemplary moral figure, but in both the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende* she is first to speak after the third visitation. Coletti, discussing the Digby playwright's revision of the episode, has argued that:

> [u]nlike their counterparts in other versions of the saint's life, who yield to Magdalene's importuning primarily for fear of the reprisals that she has threatened will result from their stinginess, the play's royal couple are genuinely moved by the spectacle they have witnessed.[592]

Coletti's suggestion that the couple are motivated more by self-interest than by honourable principles is supported by a reading of the texts. It is noticeable that the princess of the *Gilte Legende* says that it would be more 'profitable' (p. 472) for the couple to obey Magdalene's demands than risk being punished by God. Her allusion to the most 'profitable' course of action implies a concern with what the couple stand to gain or lose: she does not once voice remorse for lack of charity or express kind sentiments towards the needy Christians. Nevertheless, that the princess speaks first is important to a consideration of the scene's gender politics. While the lady does not tell her husband of the visions which she receives on the first two nights, on the third night she does ask him: '"Syr, haue ye seen the dreme that I

[591] Hamer (ed.), *St Cecilia I*, in *Gilte Legende*, p. 659.
[592] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 361.

see?"' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472). What is more, while Bokenham's prince is represented as unsure whether to comply with Magdalene's demands or whether the couple should keep their 'owlde lyuyng' (l. 5877), the princess does advise listening to Magdalene. She is not represented as an exemplar of female benevolence, but does advocate providing for the Christians.

Although the Magdalene of the narrative episode can be read as an exemplary moral figure, her representation is not entirely positive. Similarly to the princess, who can be understood in favourable and unfavourable lights (she refuses to lecture to her husband but does eventually sanction taking the best course of action), Magdalene's representation as a principled female figure is somewhat undermined by her association with a stock character commonly found in medieval antifeminist tradition. In *Sex, Ideology and Religion*, a study of representations of women in the Bible, Kevin Harris provides discussion of the 'prattling, gossiping, nagging woman'. In the course of his analysis, he cites a number of examples from *Proverbs* that provide criticism of irritating, nagging wives.[593] While the Magdalene of the narrative episode is neither represented as a silly gossip or a wife, she might be understood in terms of the interfering woman who talks too much. Though her words are not thoughtless or ill-conceived, she continues to pester the couple (the lady especially) until she gets what she desires. Like the antifeminist image of the woman as a 'Dominating Clock' in *The Lamentations of Matheolus* (1371-2), Magdalene is depicted as 'never [tiring] of chiming'.[594] For three consecutive nights, she argues her cause and does not cease doing so until the couple receive the Christians 'into her hous' and minister 'to hem [her] necessitees' (*Gilte*

[593] Kevin Harris, *Sex, Ideology and Religion: The Representation of Women in the Bible* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1984), p. 79. For broader discussion and some examples of passages from *Proverbs* (19.13; 27. 15-16; 21. 9), see pp. 78-81.

[594] Jehan le Fèvre, *The Lamentations of Matheolus*, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended,* ed. Blamires, pp. 177-97, p. 178. 'The Dominating Clock' is specifically concerned with nagging and foolish wives since the author writes: 'The female clock is really driving me mad, for her quarrelsome din doesn't stop for a moment. The tongue of a quarrelsome wife never tires of chiming in. She even drowns out the sound of a church bell. A nagging wife couldn't care less whether her words are foolish, provided that the sound of her own voice can be heard […]' (p. 178).

Legende, p. 472). While her perseverance might be considered laudable in a man, it seems less positive when considered in light of antifeminist writings and traditions. Certainly the image touches on a rich cluster of tropes with antifeminist tradition, in an intriguing way.

That Magdalene might be interpreted in terms of the nagging woman of antifeminist writings is compounded by the fact that she appears to the couple as they lie in bed. Caroll Camden's *The Elizabethan Woman* discusses a literary tradition of women appearing to their husbands as they try to sleep and providing them with 'curtaine lectures' (the term used in one of Thomas Heywood's texts).[595] Joseph Swetnam, discussing these nightly lectures, relates that:

> Women are called night-Crowes, for that commonly in the night they will make request for such toyes as commeth in their heads in the day. Women know their time to worke their craft; for in the night they will worke a man like Waxe, and draw him like as Adamont doth Iron. […] Her husband being ouercome by her flattering speech, partly hee yeeldeth to her request, although it be a griefe to him, for that he can hardly spare it out of his stocke; yet for quietnesse sake, hee doth promise what shee demandeth, partly because he would sleepe quietly in his Bed.[596]

There is a long tradition of these complaints. St Jerome's *Against Jovinian* (ca. 393) makes reference to the 'prattling complaints' made by wives 'all the night'.[597] Douglas Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (1845) provides further, more recent, treatment of a nagging wife's nocturnal visitations to her husband. The text consists of a number of 'curtain lectures' delivered by Mrs Caudle to Mr Caudle in bed.[598] Unlike in Swetnam's account above, Mrs Caudle does not use 'flattering speech' in these nightly lectures, but admonishes her husband for a vast array of perceived offences such as lending an umbrella and smelling of smoke having visited a tavern.[599] While the princess refuses to deliver curtain lectures to her

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[595] Though Camden does not herself describe these nightly lectures as curtain lectures, she refers to Thomas Heywood's *A Curtaine Lecture* in her discussion. Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman: A Panorama of English Womanhood, 1540 to 1600* (London: Cleaver-Hume Press, 1952), p. 126.
[596] Joseph Swetnam, cited in Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, p. 126.
[597] These wives 'want many things, costly dresses, gold, jewels, expensive items, maidservants, all kinds of furniture, litters [and] gilded coaches'. See St Jerome, *Against Jovinian*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Blamires, pp. 63-77, p. 70.
[598] Douglas Jerrold, *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (London: Prion Books, 2000).
[599] Joseph Swetnam, cited in Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, p. 126.

husband, Magdalene might in some ways be likened to Mrs Caudle. Her demands are not frivolous and her complaints not silly grumbles, but there are certain parallels in the representations of the women. Similarly to Mrs Caudle, Magdalene appears to the couple (not just the princess) in their beds and admonishes them in the manner of a scold. Although she is not represented as a nagging wife, she is certainly shown to be a nagging woman.

The characterization of Magdalene at this point in her legend functions on a number of different levels. Medieval women might draw a positive example from this courageous female figure (a figure who is willing to criticize abuses of authority), but she might conversely be read as the 'carping' woman of antifeminist discourse. How Magdalene is understood depends also on whether her nightly lectures are considered to be a success. Though the issue is discussed in further detail below, it is worth noting that the outcome of Magdalene's third visitation is that the couple allow the Christians into their home and minister to 'hem alle þat þei had nede' (*Legendys*, l. 5884). While the prince and princess are shown to do as they are told, they do not go any further than supplying the Christians needs: there is no reference to them giving away their 'clothys of sylk & gold' (*Legendys*, l. 5851) or feeding them with 'dyuers metys' (*Legendys*, 5845). Unlike the prince of the *North English Legendary*, who allows the Christians to be 'herberd' at his house (l. 256) and feeds them '[w]ith al [the] dayntes þat he might gete' (l. 259), Bokenham's prince provides the Christians only with the things which they require.[600] Further, although Bokenham represents the prince as being in 'greth trybulacyoun' (l. 5874), he still questions whether the couple should keep to their 'owlde lyuyng' (l. 8577). The *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* earlier relates that Magdalene's preaching against idols had little effect on the couple – her 'wurdys auaylyd no thyng' (l. 5809) – and it is possible to argue that Magdalene is not entirely successful in

[600] That the *North English Legendary* represents a more generous prince is interesting, since Winstead has discussed how the virgin martyr narratives in this legendary emphasize strongly issues pertaining to property, charity and almsgiving, representing gender conflicts in economic terms. See Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, pp. 80-2.

her preaching of social criticism. Unlike in Coletti's reading of the Digby play, the prince and princess do not seem 'genuinely moved' by her words.[601] Though Magdalene is certainly represented as a moral and courageous female figure, it is questionable whether she should be understood as an exemplary preacher and teacher.

3. The Legend and the Lower Orders

Having considered the gender politics of the episode, this part of the investigation moves on to examine its implications for non-wealthy, non-powerful, non-*gentil* factions of late-medieval society. The episode represents a liminal or borderline moment in Magdalene's legend since the account has radical potential but this potential is never fulfilled. The set piece is overdetermined and can be understood to operate on a number of different levels, holding different, even contradictory, meanings for the different readers and audiences of the texts. It can neither be categorized as a moment of subversion nor containment, though some of the subversive elements of the scene do seem to be contained.

That Magdalene's speech to the couple has shadowy subversive potential is most apparent from a reading of the episode in the *Early South English Legendary*. In this version of the narrative, a version that is not derivative of the account in the *Legenda aurea*, Magdalene is described as threatening the prince and princess with secular violence. Having admonished the couple for allowing the Christians to languish in hunger when they have 'mete and drunch inough' (l. 258), she says:

> Bote thou amendi heore stat sone, thee is sorewe al yare: ['Unless you remedy their condition soon, sorrow is all prepared for you']
> Thare schal so strong folk come thee agein that wollez thee luytel spare,
> With sweord and spere huy schullen thee sle and al thi folk furfare.
> (ll. 260-2).

[601] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 361.

While Bokenham's Magdalene warns the couple that they are 'lykly to cryin eueremore allaas' if they do not change their ways (l. 5861), the Magdalene of the *Early South English Legendary* specifically threatens the avaricious couple with 'sweord and spere' (l. 262). The protagonist's warning to the pair is described in no uncertain terms: it is made clear that the prince and princess must help the needy Christians or that violent punishment will be administered to them during their time on earth. Though the *Early South English Legendary* account is different to those accounts found in the *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, a reading of this text makes apparent the insurgent potential of the scene. The outcome of continued 'mysreule' (l. 5863), to use the term employed by Bokenham, is represented through the language of revolution. While neither of my core texts go as far as the *Early South English Legendary*, they still provide undeveloped warnings that the couple will not 'ascape so lyghtly' should they continue to abuse their authority (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472).

Given the radical potential of the scene, it is perhaps unsurprising that the *Festial* as a sermon collection produced in the 1380s does not provide treatment of the avaricious prince episode. The *Festial* relates that Magdalene and the Christians arrived in the 'londe of Martile' (pp. 185-6), having been put to sea by the Jews, and 'þere vndyr a bonke þat was nyght a tempul þei tokyn here reste'. Whereas the other texts provide comment at this point that no person would provide shelter for the poor Christian travellers, suggesting parallels with the account of Christ's Nativity, Mirk does not incorporate this narrative tradition about the people of Marseilles being inhospitable. Instead, he moves on to describe how Magdalene came into contact with the 'lorde of þat cuntre', who was visiting the temple to provide an 'offering and sacrifice' to the idols. Magdalene is described as being so 'ful of grace of þe Holy Goste' that she is able to dissuade the prince from offering sacrifice to the gods. The focus here in the account of Magdalene's admonition is thus theological, not sociological or

pastoral. The saint's advice to high-born people is about conversion to Christian faith, not charity or the redistribution of some of their wealth. Mirk's narrative ends with the depiction of the prince striking a deal with Magdalene that he will convert to Christianity if she, or the 'God þat [she preaches]' (p. 186), grants his barren wife a child. Magdalene upholds her part of the bargain and the prince prepares to visit Peter to be 'e[n]formyd […] in þe feyth fully' (p. 187).

In her study of the *Festial* collection, Judy Ann Ford argues that:

> [e]ven though they discouraged the act of rebellion, the *Festial* narratives are likely to have resonated in a variety of ways with the rebels of 1381. Mirk's sermons express a great sympathy with and understanding of the economically oppressed […]. Moreover, they affirm the notion that the rich and powerful treat the commons unjustly, and that their sufferings are caused by that injustice rather than simply being a consequence of a divinely ordained natural order. [602]

That Ford finds parallels between the arguments of the 1381 rebels and certain ideas in the *Festial* collection is interesting in light of the omission of the avaricious prince scene in the Magdalene sermon. While Ford discusses a sermon for Advent Sunday in which Christ is described as sitting with the poor during Last Judgement and as admonishing the uncharitable rich (figures who are guilty of those same transgressions as the prince and princess), the avaricious prince scene might be considered too contentious to represent.[603] Indeed, both the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* and the *Gilte Legende* depict Magdalene as addressing the prince as 'tyraunt' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472) and this term has important nuances in a historical moment characterized by socio-economic revolt. Helen Phillips, in a discussion of Chaucer's aside on tyranny in the *Manciple's Tale*, has noted that tyranny was associated in medieval

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[602] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 112. Ford does go on to note, however, that 'the wording of the *Festial* is quite careful: the narratives displace in time any treatment of rebellion or retribution against the powerful, either to the remote past of the Roman world or the remote future of eschatology, so they offer no explicit encouragement of the rebellion against injustice in the present' (p. 112).

[603] See Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, pp. 76-7. It is relevant that Ford acknowledges that medieval readers and audiences might have felt the Advent Sunday sermon to have a 'radical nature' (p. 77), since she alludes to Susan Powell's 1998 discussion of how a later revision of the collection from the fifteenth century left out the 'statement that the suffering of the poor may be attributed to the rich, and the warning that the poor will be judges at the Last Judgement' (p. 78). Ford directly quotes Powell as arguing that Mirk's words would, however, have been 'innocent at the time of writing' (p. 78, n. 22).

political discourse with 'the extortion of money from subjects and excessive or unauthorised taxation' and has suggested that Chaucer might have had 'in mind the Poll Tax tax-collectors whose aggressive visitations provoked the 1381 Rising'.[604] That the avaricious prince scene combines the threat of divinely-sanctioned punishment with accusations of royal tyranny, misrule, and economic transgression might explain why Mirk chooses not to represent the episode. The scene may not be innately radical, but it has revolutionary potential in 1380s England (an England experiencing political unrest owing in part to discontent over unequal taxation).[605]

Owst, in his discussion of sermon literature, has also pointed out the insurgent potential, advertent or otherwise, of those homilies attacking the uncharitable rich. While Magdalene does not go as far in her admonitory address as some of the preachers discussed in his study, Owst has argued that:

> The ears of the people must have grown quite familiar with homiletic phrases that sounded to them like so many threats of destruction for the powerful and the rich. Hence, for better or for worse, we must acknowledge the sermons, however little so intended, as a primary literature of secular revolt, and their authors as the heralds of political strife and future social liberties.[606]

Though it would be an overstatement to describe the Magdalene of the avaricious prince scene as a 'herald[…] of political strife and future social liberties', she aligns herself with the poor Christians (who are poor in the sense that they lack goods and power) and is shown to be fiercely critical of the prince and princess. The Magdalene of the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* makes it quite explicit that the uncharitable rich are guilty of 'greth trespaas' (l. 5858) since they have contributed to the misery of the poor Christians by refusing to 'haue reuthe ner pyte' (l. 5855). In fact, it is possible to read this figure as representing a form of

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[604] Helen Phillips, *An Introduction to the Canterbury Tales: reading, fiction, context* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 214 and p. 215.
[605] Ford draws on the work of Nigel Saul to discuss the role of 'economic oppression' and an inequitable system of taxation in bringing about the Peasants' Revolt. See Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 75.
[606] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit,* p. 236.

resistance 'from below' since she is willing to stand up to wrongful rulers and to speak out against a social order in which the rich enjoy all manner of worldly luxuries while 'goddys *seruauntys*' (*Legendys,* l. 5847, my emphasis) lack such basic necessities as food and drink. Though the content of her sermon on the third night is not in itself revolutionary, reading the episode in light of other more outwardly radical social criticism makes clear its subversive potential.

While there is subversive potential in the texts' treatment of the 'haves' and 'have-nots' theme, it is questionable whether non-*gentil*, non-wealthy, non-powerful factions of late-medieval society would find the narrative episode politically enabling. Although the counter-heroic Magdalene is certainly conceptualized as providing a strongly-worded attack on the uncharitable rich and powerful (here imagined as a pagan prince and princess) for failing to perform their duty to the poor, the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* describes her final statement to the couple as demanding that they 'amende' their 'mysreule' (l. 5863): she does not call on them to surrender the privileges of their title or to share their wealth with the poor Christians in an egalitarian sense. In fact, though the protagonist draws attention to the unfairness of a social system in which the rich enjoy 'clothys of sylk & gold' (l. 5851) and 'dyuers metys' (l. 5845) while the poor are 'lykly for to be deed for cold' (l. 5853), she does not go much further than this. The prince and princess are expected to remedy the Christians' suffering by providing for them, but they are not called upon to make any great sacrifice. In her visitation to the princess on the first night, Bokenham's Magdalene is described as telling the lady that she should convince her husband to 'releue' the 'myschef' of the Christians (l. 5821) and this concern with assisting the poor seems to lie behind the narratives. The emphasis seems to be on charity, rather than social reform.[607]

[607] Coletti is particularly concerned with the importance of charity in the Digby play. She discusses, for example, the way in which the Digby Magdalene preaches a sermon (one that is unique to the play) that 'inverts the force of Matt. 5. 6 – "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill" – to stress the spiritual favor that will redound to charitable supporters of the abject: "þey be blyssyd þat þe hungor and þe thorsty gyff fode" (1933)'. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 362.

The emphasis on charity is significant in light of questions of subversion and consolidation. Charity, in the medieval period, as in the twenty-first century, can be understood as a conservative value. While the medieval poor no doubt benefitted from acts of provision, charity is nonetheless fundamentally resistant to social change. Its ideology promotes generosity to those in need, rather than social and economic equality. In this way, it can be argued to legitimize, or at least sugarcoat, the gulf between benefactor and recipient. Though those medievals who voluntarily provided for those less fortunate than themselves certainly might have sympathized with the plight of the poor and needy (and might have felt opposition towards a system of socio-economic difference), their actions cannot be regarded as progressive. It is true that since social order was believed to be divinely ordained, then medieval individuals who behaved charitably towards their less privileged neighbours, rather than seeing their lesser status or suffering as justified, could be considered compassionate. Nevertheless, there is an important distinction to be drawn between displaying charitable benevolence (which is a duty of all Christians) and supporting structural reform of society (in which all people would be equal and the medieval poor would not need to depend on the generosity of the rich).

It is significant that the *Gilte Legende* describes the prince and princess as holding on to their goods. Though the couple are depicted as having 'receiued [the Christians] into her hous and ministred to hem [her] necessitees' (p. 472), they continue to demonstrate an attachment to worldly possessions. Indeed, the text relates that the prince was initially reluctant to take his wife to see Saint Peter and told her that she should 'abide atte home and take hede of [their] possessiones'. Although the lady is eventually able to persuade her husband to include her on the voyage, the narrator comments that:

> they charged a shippe withe gret habundaunce of good of alle thingges that were necessarie to hem and lefte alle her other thingges in the kepinge of Mari Mauudelein and went her waye (p. 473).

The passage contains a number of anxieties about the preservation of wealth (a topical issue at the late-medieval moment of the texts' cultural production). While the prince does say that his pregnant wife should not risk the 'periles of the see' (p. 472), his desire for her to 'take hede' of the couple's possessions (p. 473) suggests a concern that his goods might be taken or destroyed while he is away. Readers and audiences might locate in his speech a distinct nervousness about theft, looting or political vandalism: he experiences the anxiety of a wealthy and powerful landowner in a society where others lead a life of scarcity and deprivation. What is more, it is pertinent that Magdalene is represented as complicit in allowing the prince and princess to hold on to their wealth and possessions. There is no description of her asking the couple to divide their goods up among the poor Christians or of her providing any further comment on socio-economic themes. Given that the protagonist is depicted in the avaricious prince scene as an exemplary moral figure, the text might be felt to provide justification of a system of social and economic differences. Magdalene can be seen as both a counter-heroic figure and a woman whose actions help legitimize top-down socio-economic structures.

It is possible to trace in the episode that same 'practical ethic of charity that allows for the person of means to keep his goods and get to heaven' that Coletti has dicussed in her analysis.[608] Magdalene is represented as instructing the couple on how to be good rulers without needing to make that many personal sacrifices: they are reminded of the need to give to the poor but are not expected to give up their 'paleis' or 'clothes of silke' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 472). Though this reminder is phrased in a threatening way, the couple are permitted to maintain their position of social privilege. Not only are the prince and princess allowed to hold on to their goods and power, but there is a limit to how far they are expected to extend their charity. While the poor Christians *could* be interpreted in terms of the poor of any society (those people, like Lazarus, who remain dispossessed outside the rich man's gate), the

[608] Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 364.

protagonist only explicitly asks the couple to provide for 'goddys seruauntys' (*Legendys*, l. 5847): she does not demand that they assist the poor *per se* or make the point that other poor persons (aside from the Christians) might require their help.[609] Although subversive impulses can be traced in the strongly-worded criticism of bad rulers and justification of confrontation towards abuses of authority, the texts seem to suggest that the couple's 'mysreule' (*Legendys*, l. 5863) can be amended simply by giving to the poor Christians 'alle þat þei [have] nede' (*Legendys*, l. 5884). The episode provides a manifesto for modification of rule, rather than revolution.[610]

In fact, Magdalene's speech on the third night shares some links with literature of the 'advice to princes' genre. Chaucer's 'Lak of Stedfastnesse' (ca. 1380s) contains, in its envoy, an address to King Richard II (r. 1377-99) on his duties as ruler. In this address, the poet writes:

> O prince, desyre to be honourable,
> Cherish thy folk and hate extorcioun.
> Suffre nothing that may be reprevable
> To thyn estat don in thy regioun.
> Shew forth thy swerd of castigacioun,
> Dred God, do law, love trouthe and worthinesse,
> And wed thy folk agein to stedfastnesse.[611]

While it has been suggested above that there is subversive potential in Magdalene's criticisms of the abuses of authority, Chaucer's 'Lak of Stedfastnesse', similarly to Magdalene's preaching on the third night, also functions to instruct rulers how to behave as they should (and thereby implicitly hold on to their power). It can be seen as belonging, in spirit, to the genre of Advice to Princes, a genre which could be regarded as conservative or, at least as serving rather than threatening, those in positions of authority. Although the account of

[609] Findon comments on the fact that the Digby queen 'understands Mary's words as a request for charity for all those in need' and cites her words that '"we xuld help þem þat haue nede, / Wyth ower godys, so God ded byd"'. Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint*, p. 174 and p. 175.
[610] Compare Helen Phillips on how some post-medieval Robin Hood literature ends with 'an essentially conservative pattern of hope in the ultimate triumph of good government [and] not a celebration of anarchy or revolution'. Helen Phillips, 'Bandit Territories and Good Outlaws', in *Bandit Territories: British Outlaws and their Traditions*, ed. Phillips (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 1-23, p. 14.
[611] Chaucer, 'Lak of Stedfastnesse', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 654, ll. 22-8.

Magdalene's angry nightly visitation might provide a model for confrontation 'from below', there is also reactionary potential in the episode since her words of advice could simultaneously function to *prevent* rebellion: she advises the prince and princess of the course of action that they should take in order to ensure the harmonious governance of their realm in Marseilles. While the *Gilte Legende*'s princess tells her husband that it would be 'more profitable' for the couple to obey Magdalene's wishes than risk facing 'the wrethe of her God' (p. 472), it is possible to draw comparisons with consultative literature advising princes how to avoid experiencing 'the wrethe' of their subjects (p. 472). In other words, Magdalene's advice might be understood to provide a model for the preservation of top-down authority structures since she teaches the rulers how to avoid creating discontent while maintaining their privilege and possessions.

Summary

The avaricious prince episode is open to multiple meanings and cannot be categorized as either 'radical' or 'reactionary'.[612] While non-wealthy, non-*gentil*, non-powerful factions of late-medieval society might find dissident potential in the episode (were it to be represented in the *Festial* and read out to lower-order parishioners), upper-class readers and audiences might find a similar set of meanings to those located by Coletti in the Digby play.[613]

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[612] Rigby draws a similar conclusion about much medieval preaching on the topic of the uncharitable rich. He makes the point that: 'When preachers took for granted the inevitability of social inequality whilst simultaneously condemning the rich and expressing sympathy for the sufferings of the poor, it becomes rather problematical to classify their social theory in terms of modern definitions of "conservative" or "radical". Unlike modern "conservative" political doctrines, their sermons did not seek to defend but to condemn the current state of affairs; they did not justify the lifestyle of the ruling class but attacked fundamental elements of it, such as pride in lineage and conspicuous display. […] Yet, unlike modern "radicalism", the only solutions which preachers offered to such abuses were individual ones: moral reform by the rich and stoic endurance by the poor who will obtain their reward in the next world'. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 313.

[613] Coletti, who argues that the 'Digby play's perspective on poverty […] rationalizes the acquisition of inherited wealth and the social and material advantages that accrue from commerce', makes reference in her article to some of the 'prosperous social groups [found in] late-medieval East Anglia'. Coletti, '"*Paupertas est donum Dei*"', p. 368.

Just as Findon has argued for the importance of theories of liminality to an understanding of the Digby play and its protagonist, the avaricious prince scene as it is represented in the *Gilte Legende* and *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* might be understood as politically liminal. There is subversive potential in the criticisms of the rich and powerful couple, but the couple are permitted to hold on to their titles and much of their wealth; the texts criticize the governance of poor rulers, but these rulers are pagan and are automatically 'othered' by the texts; the narrative endorses confrontation of wicked authority figures but represents the act of confrontation as taking place in a dream (creating a sense of distance from the 'real world'). Likewise, Magdalene can be understood as confronting royal and patriarchal authority, and yet her counter-heroism is negated by her implicit advocacy of charitable provision over socio-economic equality.

Interestingly, given that the *Festial*'s Magdalene sermon omits the avaricious prince episode, Ford's reading of power structures in the broader collection shares parallels with my understanding of the politics of the scene. Just as Ford has argued that the collection 'subsumes its sympathy and support for the oppressed commons within an ideology that forbids rebellion against legitimately constituted government and the lordship of the nobility', it seems that the avaricious prince episode also represents the meeting point between different, even conflicting, sectional interests, ideas and ideals.[614] The texts provide a scathing attack on the wealthy and powerful prince and princess of Marseilles (figures who experience the social privilege enjoyed by the propertied classes), but appear to simultaneously suggest that socio-economic differences can be justified through good governance and charitable provision. It is possible to trace in the episode the intermingled voices of both the ruling and ruled classes.

[614] Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, p. 112.

Conclusion: The Magdalene of Medieval Hagiography: A Counter-Heroine to Think Back Through?

In an influential article on Christine de Pizan, Sheila Delany raises the question as to whether Christine warrants the title of a '[mother] to think back through'.[615] Her essay, which contests the notion that 'the act of writing by itself suffices to qualify an early woman writer as a feminist, a radical, a revolutionary, or a model for us', examines some difficulties of rehabilitating a female figure (specifically a female author) whose courageous behaviour clashes with her political conservatism.[616] Though Delany acknowledges some of the potentially subversive impulses of Christine's work, she is cautious about whether feminist critics should 'clasp [….] to [their] collective bosom' a woman whose ways of thinking can be seen in a number of ways as reactionary.[617] Whether or not the late-medieval hagiographical Magdalene can provide materialist and feminist critics with a '*counter-heroine* to think back through' is given consideration below.

Before doing so, this conclusion will sum up the arguments of this thesis and recap the arc of its argument. The thread that runs throughout the thesis is the contention that Mary Magdalene, as counter-heroine, can be understood to challenge patriarchal, theological and socio-economic hegemonic structures. During the course of the thesis, and in different chapters and fields, we have seen the way that Magdalene confronts individuals and groups in possession of authority. She can be interpreted as an unruly woman, and her unruliness is both emphasized and suppressed at different moments of her legend. Throughout the texts,

[615] Sheila Delany, '"Mothers to Think Back Through": Who Are they? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan', in *Medieval Texts & Contemporary Readers*, ed. Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 177-97, p. 177. Schaberg has also considered the possibility of 'thinking back' through Mary Magdalene and Virginia Woolf and some of the problems of this pursuit. See Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, pp. 34-7.
[616] Delany, '"Mothers"', p. 179.
[617] Delany, '"Mothers"', p. 180.

and as chapters two to four have shown, we find representations (which are often contained) of Magdalene as a potentially threatening female figure.

Chapter one begins by foregrounding the thesis and some of its contexts. It explains method and methodology; introduces the Mary Magdalene cultural narrative (which incorporates canonical and non-canonical texts, as well as recent fiction); and relates the thesis to recent work on saints and hagiography. Though the first chapter is largely concerned with situating the thesis and providing background, it also introduces the idea of Magdalene's counter-heroism, which is elaborated throughout the study.

The second chapter examines Magdalene's counter-heroism in the field of sexual politics. It argues that hagiographical accounts of Magdalene's life in sin and repentance can be read in terms of the disciplining of (especially female) unruliness. The chapter contends that Magdalene's sin can be read in terms of her deviation from appropriate female behaviour, and argues that her penance signifies her surrender to defining social norms. At a moment of anxieties about women's roles, but also ambition more generally, the chapter argues that these representations might function to preserve a top-down status quo.

Chapter three also finds the preservation of a top-down status quo in the depictions of Peter's spiritual authority. Nevertheless, the chapter argues that there is subversive potential in the representations of Magdalene as First Witness. It argues, further, that the account of Magdalene's preaching activities in Marseilles might be interpreted at the service of medieval women and non-clerics. While the hagiographies emphasize Peter's position of leadership, the chapter argues that the texts contain gaps through which dissident readings might be generated. These relate to women's potential for greater roles in the Church, an idea of some interest in the later Middle Ages.

The fourth chapter provides a different angle by considering Magdalene's counter-heroism in the field of socio-economics. It argues that the account of Magdalene's dream

appearances to the prince and his wife represent the most complex aspect of her conceptualization as counter- figure. Although this chapter is also interested in the treatment of poverty in the wilderness narrative, the avaricious prince scene is, I argue, especially illuminating in revealing tensions inherent in Magdalene's counter-heroic identity. Indeed, the Magdalene of this scene can be understood in several different, even contradictory, terms: social critic, nuisance woman, advocate of charity (rather than social reform), and outspoken female figure.

Read alongside each other, chapters two to four contribute to the statement of argument outlined in chapter one: that Magdalene is presented in opposition with different hegemonic figures and institutions. The three chapters argue that the texts are implicated in processes of ideology, but also that there are transgressive ideas in the texts, which relate to Magdalene's counter-heroism. Although these ideas are often contained, or at least neutralized, the thesis argues that Magdalene poses a repeated threat to authority.

Having reiterated the argument, the remainder of the conclusion will consider some of the issues raised by the thesis and in particular by a reading of Magdalene's counter-heroism.

Writing on Saint Katherine's medieval legends, Katherine J. Lewis has raised the problematic issue of how modern critics are to interpret this 'paradigm of ideal femininity':

> Is it inherently conservative, entailing a patriarchal circumscription of femininity within safe, acceptable bounds? Or did it offer subversive possibilities to women, ways of challenging accepted ideas about their social roles and spiritual potential?[618]

Mary Magdalene, save in her incarnation as the penitent woman, is no 'paradigm of ideal femininity'. Unlike the 'gracious, humble, obedient, and soft-spoken' heroines of conduct literature, at a number of points in her legend Magdalene is more like the 'abrasive, defiant, shrewish, and sharp-tongued' virgin martyrs discussed by Karen Winstead.[619] Nevertheless,

[618] Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine*, p. 230.
[619] Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs,* p. 98.

Lewis' comments raise some important questions about the politics of interpretation. Schaberg has argued that:

> [f]eminism's desire for a committed feminist and deeply political [Virginia] Woolf corresponds to its desire (or the desire of some feminists) for a feminist Mary Magdalene.[620]

While a materialist feminist reading of the texts might want to find 'a committed feminist and deeply political' Mary Magdalene – a patron saint of subversion – there is a danger of ignoring less enabling aspects of this figure's depiction. The medieval Magdalene, as I shall suggest, can be understood as a counter-heroine in more than one sense: she counters traditional norms and authority figures, but is in other respects counter to what feminist and materialist critics might want her to represent.

Interpreted together, the representations of Magdalene's life in sin, public preaching, and confrontation of the prince and his wife contribute to understandings of the saint as an unruly female figure. When these narrative conceptualizations are added to those depicting Magdalene's first sighting of the risen Christ and spiritual insights in the wilderness (insights denied to her clerical counterpart), the protagonist can certainly be appropriated as a 'counter-heroine to think back through'.

In her incarnation as dream visitant, Magdalene provides a strongly-worded attack on the wealthy prince and princess. Liberation theologian Dom Hélder Câmara famously stated: 'When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist'.[621] Like Câmara, some could see Magdalene as moving beyond the expected – desirable, even – role of the saint in her outspoken complaints on the injustices of socio-economic difference and forthright critique on the couple's moral wrongdoing.

Although Magdalene in her incarnation as sinful woman does not challenge a system of 'mysreule' (*Legendys*, l. 5863), she nevertheless manages to cultivate for herself a lifestyle

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[620] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 36.
[621] Dom Hélder Câmara, cited in Jean Marie Hiesberger, *52 Saints to Pray With* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2010), pp. 21-3, p. 22.

outside the restrictions of male rule. She is presented as confronting definitions of respectable female behaviour and, in doing so, calling into question the cultural construct of the meekand docile woman. Known as 'the sinfull woman' (*Gilte Legende*, p. 469), Mary Magdalene might not engage in the same directly confrontational behaviour as the figure found in the avaricious prince scene, but she is represented as an oppositional character: one whose relatively unusual freedoms, coupled with her refusal to act in a way considered proper, poses a challenge to social order.

While her 'sinfull' character is contained in the account of her penance, her confrontation with the social order is continued in her lingering conflict with Peter. Though the texts never depict the relationship between these characters as anything other than amicable, the tensions and power struggles found in early Christianity, and in the early history it chronicles, find some parallels in the narratives (especially in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*). In the same way that Magdalene, a woman and non-cleric, experiences divine phenomena denied to the priest in the wilderness, she is also described as First Witness of the Resurrection, an identity which calls into question the basis for Peter's primacy in the primitive Church. Although medieval hagiographers would be unaware of gnostic and apocryphal traditions pertaining to Magdalene's special status among Christ's followers, the representations of her as recipient of the protophany and, according to Bokenham, the figure held in 'syngulere amour' (l. 5685), might still have radical counter- potential.

But *radical* is a strong term, and Magdalene is no revolutionary figure. She is rebellious enough to confront an inequitable social order and to deviate from behaviour considered proper in women, but she neither advocates social reform nor holds on to her identity as the 'synfull woman'. Further, she submits to Peter's religious authority despite possessing special, even singular, knowledge of Christ and the resurrection, the central mystery of

Christianity. Whereas Cecilia remains rebellious throughout her legend, Magdalene's unruliness is often contained within the structures of the narrative.

In fact, one of the defining features of the Mary Magdalene legend lies in its recurring attempts to contain subversion. The texts apply a number of narrative strategies to keep in check the threats posed by Magdalene's unruliness, confrontational of authority, and problematic association with money (whether in her incarnation as wealthy heiress or as terrifying dream visitant). It is possible to trace in the narrative episodes a repeated pattern of containment, though one that is depicted in diverse forms. Mary Magdalene the sinner experiences Christian conversion; Mary Magdalene the First Witness surrenders to Peter's ecclesiastical authority; Mary Magdalene the social critic becomes an advocate of ascetic living (a much softer version of that aspect of her identity concerned with poverty). While the texts are never fully able to eradicate her subversive potential, each moment of deviance is offset with an image of restraint.

These questions of deviance and restraint have implications with regard to issues of desire and appropriation. Schaberg, acknowledging the situation of the critic, comments that she would:

> like to have 'found' a Mary Magdalene as bold and courageous as [Virginia] Woolf, or as Woolf's Ethel Smyth: 'She is of the race of pioneers, of pathmakers. She has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who came after her.' But history can most often merely tantalize with such possibilities.[622]

While the context is different, similar issues of reading and desire have been addressed in queer medieval studies, as chapter one has shown. Though the Magdalene of medieval hagiographical account is certainly represented as bold and courageous, it is questionable whether these attributes are enough to warrant the title 'counter-heroine to think back through'. The question is in part a conceptual one. Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* (ca. 1390s)

[622] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 353.

hinges on the query: 'What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren [?]', and it is possible to substitute 'wommen' for 'feminist and materialist critics'.[623]

If being pro-feminist simply means confronting patriarchal and other hegemonic structures, Magdalene presents an exemplary model. Yet if being pro-feminist involves demonstrating an active political commitment, it is debatable whether Magdalene goes far enough in her acts of confrontation. The sinner of the opening lines might deviate from gendered norms, but deviance is not entirely the same as resistance. Although in this narrative episode Magdalene's refusal to conform can be read as an act of rebellion against hierarchical order, nonconformity need not always be a political gesture. Likewise, while Magdalene does stand up to the prince and princess, her implicit endorsement of charity might serve to maintain traditional power structures, and this is problematic to understandings of her as a figure of political activism.

The critic faces similar difficulties to those raised by Delany in her discussion of Christine, but also more broadly connected to materialist debates about subversion and containment. Is it the role of the feminist and / or materialist critic to find subversive meanings in the text? Does being feminist mean rescuing female figures, legendary or historical, from the past? Is it more desirable to locate textual instances of subversion and dissidence than consolidation and containment? Would the medieval Magdalene be equally worthy of critical attention were she represented as a more conventional and conformist character? Would, say, Martha present an equally viable subject for a feminist or dissident analysis of hagiography?

There are no easy answers to the questions above or to whether Magdalene should be read as a 'counter-heroine to think back through'. Schaberg, discussing a paper which she delivered on the 'Mary Magdalene as Successor to Jesus' theme, relates that one respondent 'said he was *able* to imagine such a reading of John 20 with 2 Kings 2, but found no reason

[623] Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 116-22, l. 905.

why he *should*'.[624] Maybe, then, the more important question is not whether it is permissible, possible, or proper to read Magdalene as a counter- figure, but why it might be beneficial – what purpose it might serve – to interpret her this way.

The enquiry is not simply an individualist one, or a case of reader response, but a broader, cultural one. In recent years there has been enormous interest, both popular and scholarly, in Mary Magdalene, and particularly in her role as a figure of female spiritual leadership. While the Magdalene of medieval hagiography is not identical to the Magdalene(s) of present-day culture, the saint has become once again deeply ingrained within the public consciousness. Dan Brown's bestselling *Da Vinci Code* has been instrumental in bringing Mary Magdalene to a popular readership, but the resurgence of interest in this figure, as Jansen has shown, can be traced back to the 1990s.[625] As in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when nine, possibly ten, of the eleven extant Middle English Magdalene legends were composed, the past two decades represent heightened periods of Mary Magdalene cultural production.[626] Having lain dormant for several centuries, Magdalene, like the undead, miracle-working Magdalene found in the closing paragraphs of the *Gilte Legende*, has experienced a form of (in this instance cultural) revivification.[627]

Though there are differences between the Magdalenes of recent, especially feminist, fiction and the figure found in medieval hagiography, there is a similar emphasis on confrontation towards (usually male) hierarchical figures. What is more, the Magdalenes of twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction are often shown to transgress gender boundaries; to behave in ways considered deviant for their sex; and, more generally, to *counter* those social norms serving a patriarchal status quo. Malvern, whose study discusses representations of Magdalene over time, has argued that '[p]lus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose', and

[624] Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, p. 352.
[625] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 13-14.
[626] As noted in the appendix, the Digby play might have been composed in the late fifteenth century.
[627] Following the account in the *Legenda aurea*, the *Gilte Legende* describes a number of feats performed by Magdalene after her death. Given the importance of money in her legend, it is noteworthy that one of the posthumous miracles involves her breaking the 'irnes' of a man held 'in prison for money' (p. 480).

although the restrictions placed on modern females are not identical to those placed on their medieval counterparts, in both periods Magdalene provides a model, albeit an imperfect model, for the (non-compliant) woman outside the texts.[628]

Thomas Malory's *Noble Tale of the Sankgreal* (ca. 1469-70) makes reference to 'thys unsyker worlde', and the inherent instability of Magdalene legend might account for why it flourished in the 'unsyker' fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[629] Despite the patriarchal, religious, and social textual strategies employed to contain the deviant Magdalene, the lasting, or lingering, image of Magdalene is never of the docile penitent, a figure entirely at odds with the Magdalene of present-day popular imagination. Though the medieval texts attempt to flatten or suppress Magdalene's unruliness, these manoeuvres are never entirely successful, and this could explain why the dissident Magdalene has been reanimated in the literature of our age. Like the composite Magdalene herself, the medieval legend is messy: the different pieces do not always fit together and while there is an attempt to create order and stability, it is never quite possible to eradicate the subversive traces left by the 'synfull woman' and social critic.

The *Early South English Legendary* closes with the statement: 'Of the Maudeleine this is the righte endingue. / God us schilde fram peyne and to Heovene us bringue! AMEN' (ll. 642-3). That the text refers to a 'righte endingue' is interesting since the Magdalene legend is one that resists its own closure. Alan Sinfield has argued that '[a]ll stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to exclude', and this seems especially true of Middle English Magdalene hagiography.[630] Though Magdalene is described as repenting of her sins, yielding to Peter's authority, and permitting the avaricious couple to hold on to their socio-economic privilege, the more threatening representations which these replace continue to haunt the narrative. And in our own cultural moment, a

[628] Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, unpaginated.
[629] Malory, *The Noble Tale of the Sankgreal*, p. 587.
[630] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 47.

period in which debates about the relevance of feminism, women bishops, and the rich-poor divide regularly generate headlines, it is fundamental to keep reanimating these (suppressed) images of ‘Mary Magdalene, Counter-Heroine’.

Appendix 1: The Insular Mary Magdalene Legends

A brief introduction to the different insular Mary Magdalene legends, medieval and post-medieval, is provided below.

1. *Early South English Legendary*

Sherry Reames, drawing on Manfred Görlach's research, suggests that although this Magdalene legend can be found in MS Laud Misc. 108 (ca. 1300), it was probably composed considerably earlier.[631] The *Early South English Legendary* Magdalene legend contains a number of important differences from the account of Magdalene's life found in the *Legenda aurea*. For example, Mary Magdalene is described as being reimbursed for sex; she threatens the avaricious prince and his wife with secular violence; and she is never described as being witness to the Resurrection (the text does not refer to the Easter events).

2. Nicholas Bozon's *La Vie la Marie Magdalene*

Dated by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne to around the late thirteenth century, Bozon's Norman French legend makes some departures from Jacobus' *vita.* Although the sinful Magdalene is depicted as wealthy, it unusually makes only a passing allusion to her 'heritage' (l. 120): her identity as heiress is played down and no reference is made to a castle. Also atypically in this legend (a legend perhaps composed in Nottingham), Magdalene, who is said to have believed that Christ would rise from the dead, only sees the resurrected Christ after the Virgin has already done so.[632] Magdalene is described as having told the disciples about the Resurrection.

[631] Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen', p. 54.
[632] For reference to location, see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives*, p. 142.

3. The *Auchinleck* Manuscript

The manuscript has been dated to the 1330s and is from London.[633] The opening lines to the Magdalene legend are missing. The narrator elaborates on the content of Magdalene's preaching in Marseilles.

4. John Mirk's *Festial*

Unlike other texts providing treatment of the prince of Marseilles story, the *Festial* (ca. 1380s) leaves out the narrative episode describing Magdalene's dream visions to the avaricious prince. The text, composed by a cleric from Shropshire, also omits discussion of the poverty endured by the poor Christians on arrival at Gaul. The story of the conversion of the prince and his wife is different in several respects from the versions typically represented in the Middle English *vitae*.

5. *South English Legendary*

David Mycoff has shown that the *South English Legendary* (produced in the later thirteenth century) experienced revisions and that a number of the lives exist in more than one form.[634] As in the *Early South English Legendary* account, Magdalene is not depicted as witness to the Resurrection. There is also an unusual reference in this text to Magdalene forsaking the world prior to the persecutions of the Christians.[635]

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[633] See 'The Auchinleck Manuscript' > http://auchinleck.nls.uk/ [accessed 7 August 2013].
[634] Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 29. Winstead, drawing on Görlach's work, notes that the 'collection now known as the *South English Legendary* was assembled in the southwest Midlands during the second half of the thirteenth century, then revised and supplemented around 1380-90'. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, p. 71.
[635] It is said that: 'Alle þreo [Lazarus, Magdalene and Martha] ssold al hore god · atte apostles fet it caste / And sede hi wolde al þan world · clanliche forsake / And in wildernesse ech inis side · to Iesu hore herte take' (ll. 50-3).

6. *North English Legendary*

Karen Winstead dates this collection (also known as *Tractus de legenda sanctorum*) to the late fourteenth century and points out its association with the *Northern Homily Cycle*.[636] The text presents the tradition of Magdalene's estrangement from John the Evangelist. After the Resurrection, Magdalene is specifically described as having received a commission from the resurrected Christ.

7. Pseudo-John Barbour's *Scottish Legendary*

The legendary, once attributed to John Barbour, has been dated as late fourteenth century.[637] Unusually, the text begins by comparing Magdalene to other repentant sinners such as Pelagia. It also describes her as 'coapostol' (l. 49), though the events of the Resurrection are not represented. As in the *Auchinleck* legend, reference is made to the content of Magdalene's sermon in Marseilles.

8. *Speculum Sacerdotale*

According to Reames, the *Speculum Sacerdotale* was produced approximately ten to twenty years after the *Festial* (making it early fifteenth century).[638] Edward H. Weatherly (1936) tentatively suggests that it might originate from the south of the West Midlands area.[639] There is no reference to Mary Magdalene's noble background, voyage to Gaul, or to the prince of Marseilles story. It is said that Magdalene should be worshipped in the litany before all virgins except Christ's mother.

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[636] Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, p. 78.
[637] Mycoff, 'Part I', p. 31. Mycoff acknowledges that this dating is taken from Frances A. Foster.
[638] Reames, 'The Legend of Mary Magdalen', p. 55.
[639] Edward H. Weatherly, 'Introduction', in *Speculum Sacerdotale*, pp. xv-xliv, p. xxi.

9. *Gilte Legende*

The legend (1438) corresponds with the *Legenda aurea* account, though, like a number of other Middle English translations, does not include discussion of the etymology of Mary Magdalene's name. Richard Hamer suggests that the existing manuscripts, none of which are from before the middle of the fifteenth century, seem to be from the London and south midlands area.[640] Unlike Jacobus' *vita*, traditions relating to Mary Magdalene's estrangement from John the Evangelist are not discredited.

10. Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*

Bokenham's text, produced in East Anglia and completed by 1447, makes a number of expansions to Jacobus' version of the *vita*. As well as containing a prologue and 'prolocutorye', the text elaborates the description of Mary Magdalene's repentance. The legend also provides more lengthy treatment of the special relationship between Magdalene and Christ; describes Mary (Magdalene) and Martha in terms of the active and contemplative paths; and presents the resurrected Christ as providing Mary Magdalene with a commission.

11. William Caxton's *Golden Legende*

The text was published in 1483 by William Caxton. Caxton makes use of the *Legenda aurea, Légende Dorée* and *Gilte Legende* in his translation. The text relates the standard version of events found in *Legenda aurea*. As in the *Gilte Legende*, the author neither discredits nor confirms the traditions relating to Magdalene's estrangement from John the Evangelist.

[640] Hamer, 'Introduction', in *Gilte Legende*, III. 47.

12. Digby *Mary Magdalen* play

Described by Theresa Coletti as late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century, the East Anglian Digby play makes a number of important additions to Jacobus's *vita*.[641] As well as including several original characters (not least Herod and Pilate), the text makes considerable alterations to many aspects of the plot. For example, Magdalene is not put to sea by the Jews, but is sent by an angel to Marseilles to convert the royal couple and to act as a 'holy apostylesse' (l. 1380). Coletti and Barbara Newman have both pointed out the importance of the fact that the saint is associated with the Virgin Mary.[642]

13. Lewis Wager's *The Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene*

While the text was first published in 1566, Frederick Ides Carpenter (1904) dates the play to around 1550.[643] This morality play concerns, as the title suggests, Magdalene's life in sin and repentance. It does not include the post-Ascension material. The text provides lengthy dramatization of Magdalene's corruption by the different vices and stages representation of the protagonist being forgiven by Christ: 'thy faith hath saued thee; go in pees' (l. 1855).

14. Thomas Robinson's *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*

H. Oskar Sommer suggests a date of around 1621.[644] The poem, comprising two parts, concentrates on Magdalene's sin; prick of conscience; return to sin; possession by demons; exorcism; repentance; and meeting with the resurrected Christ. The text describes in great

[641] Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints*, p. 2.
[642] Both critics include discussion of the passage in which the queen of Marseilles, waking from her sleep, says: 'O *virgo salutata*, for ower salvacyon! / O *pulcra et casta*, cum of nobyll alyavns!/ O almyty Maydyn, ower sowlys confortacyon! O demvr Mavdlyn, my bodyys sustynavns!' (ll. 1899-1902). See Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, p. 177 and Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints*, pp. 151-4 and pp. 175-9 especially.
[643] Frederick Ides Carpenter, 'Introduction', in *The Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene*, pp. xiii-x1, p. xv.
[644] H. Oskar Sommer, 'Introduction', in *The Life and Death*, ed. Sommer, pp. ix-xxiv, xi.

detail the different stages pertaining to Magdalene's delivery from sin. As in the Wager play above, the post-Ascension material is omitted.

Appendix 2: Narrative Excerpts

Excerpts relating to the different narrative episodes discussed in chapters two to four are provided below.

2.1

Mirk's Account of Magdalene's Sin and Repentance.

This excerpt has been removed by the author for copyright reasons. Please see pp. 184-5 of the *Festial* edition listed in the bibliography.

2.2

Bokenham's Account of the Resurrection Scene

As above. Please see ll. 5710-30 of the Magdalene text in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen.*

2.3

Bokenham's Account of Magdalene-Peter Relations

As above. Please see 1l. 5885-5909 of the Magdalene text in the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen.*

2.4

The *Gilte Legende* Version of the Avaricious Prince Scene

As above. Please see pp. 471-2 of the *Gilte Legende* edition listed in the bibliography.

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