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THE FIGURE OF MARY MAGDALENE IN ROBERT SOUTHWELL'S *MARY MAGDALENS FUNERALL TEARES* AND RAGUSAN BAROQUE LONG POEMS

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Abstract: The paper analyses the image of Mary Magdalene in three representative examples of the Baroque "literature of tears" – two Ragusan long poems by Ivan Bunić Vučić (1592-1658) and Ignjat Đurđević (1675-1737), and an English prose treatise/meditation by Robert Southwell (1561-1595). Their hitherto unexplored similarities and differences are investigated in the light of their specific religious and cultural-historical contexts, as well as their position and meaning in the reception history of the Mary Magdalene figure. In addition to the typical Baroque preoccupation with the relationship between pragmatism and aesthetics, sacred truth and poetic fiction, a comparative analysis of the three texts also aims to highlight their treatment of the Mary Magdalene figure, taking into account her traditional image of the sensuous penitent, but also the possibility of re-valuating her initial gospel image of a devout disciple and the apostle to the apostles.

Keywords: religious literature, literature of tears, the Baroque, Mary Magdalen, contrition, female apostolate

Introduction: the multifaceted figure

As one of the most popular and intriguing biblical female characters, who has inspired a rich and long tradition of artistic representation, spanning various national and supranational cultural spaces, Mary Magdalene has become an exemplary figure of cultural transfer. During the centuries, this figure has accrued a plethora of meanings, based both on the primary biblical sources as well as on the later apocryphal and

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legendary additions.[1] One image created along these lines emerged as probably the most influential in the Western theological and cultural tradition – that of a former sinner (commonly associated with bodily unchastity and sensuousness) who later became a disciple of Jesus and a witness to his crucifixion and resurrection. This Mary Magdalene was actually a composite figure, conflating the character explicitly attested by the Gospels – i.e., identified by this name and described as a disciple and a witness to Christ's resurrection – with the two other biblical women: the penitent sinner who wept at Jesus's feet and anointed them (Luke 7, 37-50),[2] and Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus who also anointed Christ's feet shortly before crucifixion (John, 12, 1-8).[3] Definitely established by Pope Gregory the Great in 591, this image was not accepted by the Eastern tradition, which insisted on separating the three female figures. Despite occasional similar attempts by individual scholars, the Western tradition, and particularly its Catholic segment, took longer to fully recognise this fact – it was only in the mid-twentieth century, for instance, during the 1969 liturgical calendar reform, that the Catholic Church officially acknowledged Mary Magdalene's separate identity. More serious attempts at her revalorisation have only been undertaken in the last decades within feminist theology, especially with regard to her discipleship and her apostolic role, which began with her annunciation of Christ's resurrection to other disciples, and thus earned her the title of the *apostolorum apostola*, that is, an apostle to the apostles.

The overall European and Western religious and cultural history, however, appears to have found the composite figure of Mary Magdalene more appealing and intriguing. As Joseph Gibaldi aptly summarises, despite its being "sheer invention completely without Biblical support, it does make the saint a more vibrant, more fully developed, and certainly more attractive figure than the splintered ones we see in the gospels".[4] Combined with the legendary and apocryphal elaborations of her post-biblical story, which included the presumed final arrival in southern France, her apostolate there and later eremitical seclusion and death,[5] such a multifaceted image of Mary Magdalene also proved adaptable to different periods and their various agendas.[6]

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[1] The additional, specific interpretations of Mary Magdalene which arose within the gnostic teachings remain out of the scope of this paper.

[2] Moreover, this figure is sometimes conflated with the adulteress in John 8, 1-11 and/or the woman from Samaria in John 4, 6-42.

[3] Hence, this figure is sometimes amalgamated with the woman who anointed Christ's head (Matthew 26, 6-13 and Mark 14, 3-9).

[4] Joseph Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse: Mary Magdalen in European literature, 1500 to 1700*, dissertation, New York: New York University, 1973, 15.

[5] Among the various versions of Mary Magdalene's post-biblical life, the one included in *The golden legend* (*Legenda aurea*) by Jacobus de Voragine, which combined her so-called *vita eremitica* and *vita apostolica*, proved to be the most popular and influential.

[6] Selecting out of the vast body of literature devoted to the Mary Magdalene figure, the above overview is based on J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*; Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1995; Katherine

Following her highly popular saintly cult in the Middle Ages, the Early Modern period witnessed a renewed interest in Mary Magdalene, particularly in the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries. Heralded in the early sixteenth century with the controversy sparked by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples's (1517) attempts at dismantling her tripartite figure, this interest was later fostered both by the Counter Reformation (intent, among other things, on preserving this figure)[7] and its programme of devotional reform, as well as by the rise of the wider European Baroque aesthetics and worldview.[8]

This common framework allows for comparison of Mary Magdalene's literary representations in different contexts, even if they lacked direct contact at the time, as was the case with the English and Croatian culture. This paper will focus on three such exemplary texts – two Ragusan long poems by the renowned authors Ivan Bunić Vučić (1592-1658) and Ignjat Đurđević (1675-1737), and an English prose treatise/meditation by Robert Southwell (1561-1595), a highly influential author, albeit somewhat of an outsider whose literary merits took some time to be acknowledged by the English literary history. All three texts arose within the Catholic tradition and hence adhere to the tripartite Mary Magdalene image. Their specific takes on this image, as well as the segments of Mary Magdalene's biographical narrative they chose to retell, show indicative convergences and divergences, and involve a number of religious, social and aesthetic issues, both of the then-contemporary relevance and of a broader (literary-)historical interest.

The Baroque Mary Magdalene: Southwell, Bunić and Đurđević

The first of the three texts, Southwell's *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares* (1591),[9] has the narrowest focus and is concentrated merely on a brief segment of Mary Magdalene's

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Ludwig Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen. Preaching and popular devotion in the later Middle Ages*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000; Željana Puljiz Šostik, *Književno prikazivanje sv. Marije Magdalene. Primjeri baroknih poema i modernističkih drama u hrvatskoj književnosti*, master's thesis, Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2006; Jadranka Rebeka Anić, "Marija iz Magdale od Novoga zavjeta do legendi", in: ed. Jadranka Rebeka Anić, Irena Sever Globan, *Marija Magdalena: od Isusove učenice do filmske bludnice. Teološko-kulturalna analiza*, Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2018, 43-293; Philip C. Almond, *Mary Magdalene. A cultural history*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

[7] Criticism of the traditional composite figure, on the other hand, resonated well with the Protestant animosity towards saints' cults in general (K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen*, 334). The Protestant perception of Mary Magdalene in this period was nonetheless neither monolithic nor entirely dismissing and will be further considered below.

[8] Cf. J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 29; K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen*, 334-335. The term Baroque here denotes a heterogenous (literary-)historical construct covering the period from the late sixteenth and entire seventeenth centuries, as well as the eighteenth century to a certain extent, leaving aside debates and scepticism regarding its usage, especially in the English literary scholarship.

[9] Although the protagonist's name is spelled "Marie" on the title page of the first edition of Southwell's text, it is modernised into "Mary" within the printed text itself (with only occasional exceptions). The same principle is applied to the spelling of the adjective "funerall", printed as "fvneral" on the title page. This edition is quoted throughout this article (Robert Southwell, *Marie Magdalens Fvneral Teares*, London, 1591), following its transcription, except in evident spelling errors.

gospel story – the morning of Christ's resurrection and Mary's desperation at the (apparent) loss of his body, as well as her insistent wish to retrieve it. Primarily based on the account in John 20, 11-18, Southwell's narrative includes Christ's appearance in the so-called *hortulanus* scene, where Mary mistakes him for the gardener and is prohibited to touch him. This is yet followed by a telling addition from the Gospel of Matthew (28, 1-10) – a subsequent new encounter with Christ, where Mary is eventually allowed to embrace his feet, together with other women in her company.[10] In both gospel episodes Mary is commissioned to take the news of Christ's resurrection to the disciples, as she is in Southwell's version, while her previous, composite history is here only briefly and occasionally hinted at, with references to her past sinfulness ("former alluring glaunces" and "artificiall paintings"; 56) and to the gospel accounts of Mary of Bethany. In addition to the biblical texts, Southwell relied on another primary source – the medieval homily *De Beata Maria Magdalena* (twelfth century, misattributed to Origen or Bonaventure), which he partially translated as well. The homily provided him with the core story and a dialogical structure,[11] but Southwell substantially amplified it, creating a version "roughly three times" longer than the original.[12]

Unlike Southwell's, the two Croatian texts present a more extensive version of Mary Magdalene's composite history. Ivan Bunić Vučić's *Mandalijena pokornica* (*Magdalene the Penitent*, 1630, 1638, 1659), a poem in three cantos (literally *plačevi* = weepings), unfolds a linear narrative, conflating all evangelical reports[13] and amplifying them with the traditional medieval accounts of her origin and previous sinful life.[14] Mary Magdalene is thus portrayed as a beautiful young sinner who undergoes conversion after seeing and meeting Christ (Bunić has an additional, initial episode of Christ's preaching in the temple not attested by the gospels). The topic of conversion and contrition occupies the largest part of the poem, encompassing all three cantos, and the final canto includes an amplified description of Christ's crucifixion, followed by the report on his resurrection and the aforesaid Mary Magdalene's apostolic commission.

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[10] Cf. Emily A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion: Robert Southwell's Mary Magdalene", *Studies in philology* 121/1 (2024), 110, 120.

[11] Cf. Debora K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity. The Renaissance Bible today*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford: University of California Press, 1994, 169; Patricia Badir, *The maudlin impression. English literary images of Mary Magdalene, 1550-1700*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009, 65-71; E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 117-119.

[12] E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 119.

[13] Each canto has a motto with a short biblical quotation in Latin: Lk 7, 36-37 (1st); Lk 7, 37,48 (2nd); John 20, 12, 17 (3rd). These mottos function as symbolic signposts, although Bunić does not rely exclusively on the quoted gospel segments.

[14] Cf. Ž. Puljiz Šostik, *Književno prikazivanje sv. Marije Magdalene*, 53-56.

Ignjat Đurđević's *Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice* (*Sighs of the Penitent Magdalene*, 1728), a somewhat belated specimen of the Baroque poem, is longer than Bunić's – it has eight cantos (literally "sighs" = "uzdisanja")[15] – and espouses a different temporal and narrative perspective. Đurđević's Magdalene is presented in the post-gospel context, as a penitent eremite in the "Marseille desert" ("marsijska pustoš")[16] who at the same time retrospectively reflects on her past life. Đurđević similarly incorporates descriptions of her previous sinful ways[17] and the features of Mary of Bethany in this account, as well as an extensive analepsis on crucifixion, but omits the resurrection episode.[18] His story of Mary Magdalene ends with her beatific vision of heaven and subsequent death, which in this case equals the final state of bliss in unity with God.

As is evident from the comparison of their brief summaries, all three examples present Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner, although the Croatian poems place more emphasis on this aspect, while Southwell is primarily preoccupied with her pain at the loss of Christ. It is worth noting here that his image of Mary Magdalene can be complemented with Southwell's two short poems: *Mary Magdalen's Complaint at Christ's Death*, which is also concentrated on the protagonist's mourning for the Lord, and *Mary Magdalen's Blush*, where she herself reflects on her earlier sinful life devoted to secular love and earthly pleasure. Both poems nevertheless emphasise Mary's powerful feeling of love for Christ, as one of the key features of her traditional saintly image that dominates the examples in focus of this analysis as well. Southwell acknowledges this already in the prefatory dedication to Dorothy Arundel ("The Epistle Dedicatorie"), where he praises Mary Magdalene as the paragon of "a most sincere and perfect loue", and her unwavering and passionate love for Christ is repeatedly evoked and discussed within the text. Bunić's and Đurđević's Magdalene is similarly described in these terms, for instance, as being the "most powerfully inflamed" with love ("najvruće užežena"; Bunić) or as "a flaming lover" ("ļubovnica ogńena"; Đurđević).[19] Her love as a theological

[15] The first version of the poem, available in a manuscript, consisted of only two cantos, which Đurđević incorporated into the final, widened and printed version of his poem (cf. Krešimir Šimić, "*Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice* Ignjata Đurđevića kao apologijska religiozna poema", in: Krešimir Šimić, *Književni svjetovi. Književnohermeneutičke studije iz hrvatske književnosti*, Osijek: Matica hrvatska-Ogranak Osijek, 2007, 123-124).

[16] Đurđević's narrative framework is, in other words, based on Mary Magdalene's *vita eremitica*, which, moreover, shows evidence of conflation with the life of another penitent eremite and a former prostitute – Saint Mary of Egypt (K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen*, 37-38; S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, 108; Zoran Kravar, "*Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice*", in: *Leksikon hrvatske književnosti: djela*, ed. Dunja Detoni-Dujmić et al., Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2008, 923).

[17] Đurđević's text omits the episode in Simon the Pharisee's house (Lk 7, 37-50) but expands the story on Mary Magdalene's obsession with her beauty and seduction.

[18] Cf. also Ž. Puljiz Šostik, *Književno prikazivanje sv. Marije Magdalene*, 57-63.

[19] Ivan Bunić Vučić's poem is throughout cited from Dživo Bunić Vučić, *Djela*, ed. Dunja Fališevac, Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1995, and Ignjat Đurđević's from Ignat Đorđić, *Djela Ińacija Ġorġi (Igńata Đorđića). Ḱniga prva (Stari pisci hrvatski. Ḱniga XXIV)*, ed. Milan Rešetar, Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1918.

virtue implies a strong desire for a spiritual union with Christ, which overcomes a mere desire for absolution from sin. All three texts explicitly mention and comment upon such symbolic implications of Mary Magdalene's figure, with substantial portions of reflexion and argumentation in Southwell's and Đurđević's case.

The three authors' choice of subject matter appears as symptomatic of their age not only in terms of the general Baroque inclination towards religious topics, fuelled by the Counter Reformation in the Catholic context, but also in a more specific manner. The immense popularity of Mary Magdalene in the Baroque, evidenced by her countless artistic representations, is usually ascribed to her double appeal as a model of penance and as of "spiritualised sensuality"[20] or "sacred eroticism".[21] Although her figure and its treatment cannot be reduced to these two aspects, they are indicative of some of the wider trends in the Baroque and overall Early Modern (religious) literature. These included the movement from secular and erotic (*amor carnalis*) to divine love (*amor sacralis*)[22] and the accompanying appropriation of amorous discourse for religious purposes, what Louis Martz's once-influential study termed as "sacred parody".[23] This tendency was not without earlier precedents, both biblical (especially *The Song of Songs*) and medieval, and could at the same time be viewed as a form of reclaiming, bearing in mind that medieval and Early Modern secular love poetry had previously borrowed from the same religious discourse. The term "theologised Petrarchism"[24] could be appropriate in this context as well, in view of the enormous influence of Petrarch's poetry in the Early Modern era and its own transition from a secular to a sacred object of devotion – albeit with a caveat that Petrarchism was not the only (dominant) model of love poetry at the time. Neoplatonic love poetry in particular, as a cognate model aimed at divinisation of love, provided another possible source of influence.[25]

The Ragusan poems initially employ elements of amorous discourse in their literal sense, when describing Mary Magdalene's sinful past, dominated by her obsession with

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[20] J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 141.

[21] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 192.

[22] Dunja Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu-Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1987, 72.

[23] Louis Martz, *The poetry of meditation: a study in English religious literature of the seventeenth century*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1955, 186. This term has become a critical commonplace in the English literary scholarship, although it has not been accepted without reserve and/or critique (see e.g., Rosamund Tuve, "Sacred 'parody' of love poetry, and Herbert", *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961), 249-290; Gary M. Bouchard, "'If his compare with mine': re-thinking sacred parody in light of Robert Southwell's version of Edward Dyer's 'Fancy'", *Renascence* 75/2 (2023), 111-128).

[24] Anne R. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell. Snow in Arcadia: redrawing the English lyric landscape, 1586-1595*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, 241.

[25] Cf. D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 72.

beauty and secular love pursuits.[26] This is, however, followed by the crucial moment of transition, which provides amorous vocabulary with a new meaning. Mary's love for God is thus described in some of the typical Petrarchan terms, with the imagery of fire and flames (as in the abovementioned examples), eyes and light, captivity, arrows and wounds to the heart.[27] Elaborating on the antithesis between human and divine love, both authors, among other things, use the image of the hunter becoming the hunted to refer to the moment of transformation:

> Ko bi t' reko, Mandalijena,
> kad se u lov ti odpravi
> da ćeš biti ulovljena
> od nebeske tad ljubavi? (Bunić, canto 1, p. 149)

(Who could have told you, Magdalene, / when you embarked on a hunt, / that you yourself would then get captured / by heavenly love?).

> Žudjeh ńekad, o gizdavi
> nad sviem ļudskiem sinovima,
> da te ljepos mâ zatravi,
> nu stravļena tvo'im zracima
> i požudna tvoga pliena
> bih u plienu zaplieńena (Đurđević, canto 3, p. 511)

([Addressing Christ]: Once I yearned, oh the beautiful/ son of human above all others, / to enchant you with my beauty, / but charmed by your rays, /while desiring for you to become my prey / I myself became the captured prey.)[28]

Southwell's portrayal of Mary Magdalene, who is similarly described as a "captiue in so many prisons (...) Loue being her Jailor in them all" (p. 7), highlights another antithetical aspect of love, fundamental for Petrarchan poetry. Love in this sense implies a bitter-sweet emotion that inevitably involves pain, caused by the beloved's rejection, absence and/or death, although it does not leave the lover any less steadfast nor adamant in his pursuit. This aspect is also present in the two Ragusan poems, but with Mary Magdalene herself as the source of her own pain, since it is her earlier sinful conduct that has deprived her of divine presence, threatening to plunge her into a state of spiritual death, as well as injuring Christ as the new object of her love and causing his expiatory suffering. In Southwell's portrayal of Mary Magdalene, the feeling

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[26] Bunić and Đurđević (in his earlier years) wrote amorous poetry. On the other hand, Đurđević's Mary Magdalene explicitly criticises secular love poetry (in cantos 2 and 3), which fuelled her own amorous appetites and fed her vanity as well.

[27] See also Ž. Puljiz Šostik, *Književno prikazivanje sv. Marije Magdalene*, 64-73.

[28] All translations from Croatian into English are by the authors of this article. Quotations from Bunić's and Đurđević's poems are at times deliberately literal, as in the abovementioned examples, in order to preserve the specificities of their style and rhetoric.

of abandonment and absence is externalised, and even more strongly pronounced. Her extensive mourning for Christ hence comes closer to "the peculiarly Petrarchan form of melancholia"[29] and foregrounds love's close relation to death, which opens the narrative and is elaborated throughout the text:

> Amongst other mourneful accidents of the passion of Christ, that loue presenteth it selfe to my memory, with which the blessed Mary Magdalen louing our Lord more than her life, followed him in his iourney to his death, attending vppon him when his Disciples fledde, and being more willing to die with him, than they to liue without him. But not finding the fauour to accompany him in death, and loathing after him to remaine in life, the fire of her true affection enflamed her heart, and her enflamed heart resolued into vncessant teares; so that burning and bathing between loue and griefe, shee led a life euer dying, and felt a death neuer ending. (pp. 1-2)

In addition to Petrarchan, Southwell's Magdalene figure invokes references to another literary model, popular and influential in the Early Modern era – Ovid's *Heroides*. Echoes of Ovid's portrayal of abandoned women-lovers[30] are nevertheless cast in a specific, Christianised form: Southwell's, as well as a number of other Mary Magdalene narratives that emerged at the time, "fuse this highly eroticized Ovidian representation of abandoned females with the *Song of Songs* and the hagiographic tradition, producing a self-conscious amalgam of the ancient rhetoric of female desire and the biblical language of erotic spirituality".[31] Southwell's Ovidian intertext might be widened to include the figures of speechless women such as Philomela and Lucrece, whom his Mary Magdalene comes to resemble in her partial state of speechlessness before the risen Christ.[32]

The two Croatian poems can fit into this picture to a certain extent, inasmuch as they include a temporarily abandoned lover's address to the absent beloved,[33] but bearing

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[29] Gary Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia in Robert Southwell's *Mary Magdalene's Funeral Tears*", in: *Catholic culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Ronald Corthell et al., Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 143; see also Gary Kuchar, *Divine subjection: the rhetoric of sacramental devotion in Early Modern England*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005, 59; Mark Russell Benedict, *The ministry of passion and meditation: Robert Southwell's Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares and the adaptation of continental influences*, master's thesis, Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2010, 18-27.

[30] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 170-176; M. R. Benedict, *The ministry of passion and meditation*, 14-17.

[31] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 171.

[32] G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*, 65-66; G. Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia", 147-148.

[33] Cf. also Lovro Škopljanac, "Sižejna izgradnja poeme u starijoj hrvatskoj književnosti", in: *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti. Zbornik radova XVII. Poema u hrvatskoj književnosti: problem kontinuiteta*, ed. Cvijeta Pavlović, Vinka Glunčić-Bužančić, Andrea Meyer-Fraatz, Split-Zagreb: Književni krug Split-Odsjek za komparativnu književnost Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2015, 44.

in mind that her suffering emanates from her own guilt. Bunić's Mary Magdalene is partly speechless as well, in the central episode of her repentance and absolution by Christ (canto 2), based on the biblical account of the sinner who anointed his feet. As further analysis will show, however, neither Croatian nor Southwell's Magdalene figures remain entirely silent.

The fact that Mary Magdalene in all three instances has her desire fulfilled and is finally united with Christ departs from the Petrarchan (and Ovidian) intertext, but also sanctifies her passion and religious passion in general. Fostering of "a somatic experiencing of the sacred" in artistic representations of Mary Magdalene,[34] which resonated well with the Baroque sensibility and its emphasis on sensuality,[35] made her figure exemplary in the wider context of the Early Modern sacred rhetoric, which aimed to reaffirm the value of "passionate discourse"[36] as part of the overall amalgamation of emotional with spiritual and cognitive experiences.[37]

Southwell seems to have been aware of the possible objections to Mary Magdalene's display of excessive passion and hence felt the need to provide justification in his prefatory paratexts. The dedication to Dorothy Arundel maintains that Magdalene's passions "were not guides to reason, but attendantes vpon it" and were "commanded by such a loue as could neuer exceede, because the thing loued was of infinite perfection". The address "To the Reader" promises that the text will help him "to teach his thoughts eyther to temper passion in the meane, or to giue the bridle onely where the excesse cannot be faultie". Southwell's arguments are informed by the then influential Augustinian theory, which sanctioned excessive passion when directed towards God as the supreme object,[38] viewing emotions as a function of the will and emphasising the indispensable symbiosis of love and reason in his pursuit.[39] Approaching it from a gender perspective, Gary Kuchar underlines the difference between "a feminized, Augustinian language of excess", and the opposing "masculinized, Aristotelian language of temperance", as another important authority that is partly evoked in Southwell's justifying explanations.[40] This

[34] Lisa McClain, "'They have taken away my lord': Mary Magdalene, Christ's missing body, and the mass in Reformation England", *The sixteenth century journal* 38/1 (2007), 95-96.

[35] Cf. J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 141.

[36] As E. Ransom has pointed out, the terms passions and affections appear as more appropriate in this context, rather than emotions, whose prevalent usage dates back only to the nineteenth century (Ransom, "Passions and the Passion", 102, n. 4).

[37] Debora K. Shuger, "The philosophical foundations of sacred rhetoric", in: *Religion and emotion: approaches and interpretation*, ed. John Corrigan, Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2004, 121-123; see also Ivana Brković, "Saintly love of Saint Catherine in a mystical poem by Junije Palmotić", *Dubrovnik Annals* 54 (2020), 106-109.

[38] G. Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia", 138, 140.

[39] D. K. Shuger, "The philosophical foundations of sacred rhetoric", 123.

[40] G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*, 69; cf. also G. Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia", 150.

difference opens up the issue of Mary Magdalene's femininity and the (in)acceptability of female spiritual authority, prompting the assumption that Southwell's need to contain the excessive passion of such a figure of "female ideality" within acceptable bounds, in the prefaces and within the text, could have made her more acceptable to both male and female audience at the time.[41]

Passions and affections nevertheless remain important for Southwell's depiction of Mary Magdalene and the message her figure is presumed to convey. This does not exclude the corporeal dimension either – it is emphasised throughout the text, in Mary's resolute pursuit of Christ's physical body and even in her desire to identify with it in the pain of crucifixion and in death. Deeming herself yet unworthy of such complete identification, she embraces a state of paralysis and incessant mourning on the verge between life and death:

> shee was not there where shee was, for shee was wholly where her Maister was; more where shee loued than where shee liued, and lesse in her self than in his body, which notwithstanding, where it was shee could not imagine. For she sought, and as yet found it not, and therefore stood at the Tombe weeping for it, being now altogether giuen to mourning & driuen to misery (p. 6).

On the other hand, the corporeal dimension is positively reasserted in the added conflation with Matthew's gospel (not to be found in the pseudo-Origen's homily), where Mary Magdalene is finally allowed to touch Christ's feet.[42] Exploring the epistemological implications of this dimension in Southwell's prose, as well as in a number of similar narratives from this period, Debora Shuger views their figures of Mary Magdalene as exemplary for "the premodern constructions" of desire on various levels: "bodily, religious, and intellectual".[43] By emphasising bodily presence and resisting (exclusive) allegorisation of the story,[44] these texts present "an erotics of knowledge", wedding, instead of dissociating, reason and passion.[45]

The texts of Đurđević and Bunić are more critically inclined towards the body, which is finally renounced in Mary Magdalene's death and her soul's ascension into heaven (briefly described in Đurđević's and acknowledged as a fact in Bunić's text). Negative connotations of corporeality and passions are highlighted in the narrative of the heroine's past sinful life, where her indulgence in her own sensuous beauty and amorous pursuits is explicitly condemned. They are nevertheless depicted in some detail, especially in Đurđević's case, and she is equally passionate in her subsequent

[41] Cf. G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*, 69.

[42] Cf. E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 119-120.

[43] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 8.

[44] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 173.

[45] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 186-187.

endeavours to renounce and punish her flesh. Bunić's Magdalene dramatically strips all her adornments after the first encounter with Christ, violently crying and marring her appearance to become dishevelled and bloodied, and finally swoons from the emotional strain. Đurđević's Mary Magdalene is already an eremite[46] who regularly mortifies her flesh, not only by meagre and harsh living conditions (she is at first depicted in the classical *locus horridus*, symbolic of her sin and repentance),[47] but with physical punishment, i.e., self-flagellation. In addition, she is subject to strong emotional suffering, as she struggles with her guilt and with various inner temptations, which appear as her nightly thoughts in what comes to resemble an internal morality play in canto 4. Emotional excess is thus equally important in the two Ragusan poems, but again as long as it presumes channelling the protagonist's (and readers') affective responses in the proper direction.

These narratives feature the body of Christ as well, with emphasis on its salvific function. Bunić's Mary Magdalene is allowed to have direct contact with Christ in the aforesaid episode of repentance and anointment of his feet, where she remains outwardly silent, but lets her bodily actions act as a substitute for speech and a path to her redemption:[48]

> S tijem je sudim pridrazima
> vrh Božjega slavna tijela
> mastim, suzam i pramina
> i celovim zadaždjela.
>
> Njega maže, sebe ozdravlja,
> nnd njim suzi, sebe umiva,
> sebe odriješa, na nj vez stavlja,
> koga izdava, sad celiva.
>
> Izrijet jednu riječ ne more,
> jadnu pjesan da ponovi,
> ali za nju sveđ govore
> mas, pram, suze i celovi. (canto 2, p. 163)

(With these precious vessels / she rained a rain of ointment, tears, tresses and kisses / on God's glorious body. // Anointing him, she heals herself, / crying over him, she washes herself, / liberates herself and binds him, / whom she betrayed now she kisses. // One single word she is unable to utter, / her mournful poem to repeat, / but in her stead continue to speak / ointment, tresses, tears and kisses.)

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[46] The heroine's future eremitical life is only announced at the end of Bunić's canto 1.

[47] Cf. K. Šimić, "*Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice*", 124.

[48] Mary does go on to pronounce her penitent confession to God, but inwardly, starting with the address to Christ's feet.

The rhetorical power of outward, bodily signs of inexpressible passion, especially tears and sighs, is similarly asserted in Southwell's text, where they act as Mary Magdalene's "mighty oratours" (p. 56) in the encounter with the risen Christ:

> Loue would haue spoken, but feare enforced silence. Hope frameth the words, but doubt melteth them in the passage; (...) In fine teares issued in liew of words, and deep sighes in stead of long sentẽces, the eie supplying the mouths default, and the heart pressing out the vnsillabled breath at once, which the conflict of her disagreeing passions, would not suffer to be sorted into the seuerall soundes of intelligible speeches (p. 59).

The crucified body of Christ plays an important role in the two Croatian poems too, both on the literal and symbolic levels of narrative. Their recounting of his passion provides another opportunity to foreground the affective dimension of the text, with dramatic and emotionally charged descriptions of his suffering and of the emphatic reactions of Mary Magdalene, as well as his mother and some of the other disciples (John in both poems and Peter only in Đurđević's).[49] Mary Magdalene additionally agonises over her own complicity in Christ's crucifixion as a former sinner, and Đurđević's heroine, like Southwell's, later wishes to identify with Christ and partake in his pain and agony (cantos 4 and 7), although her physical suffering primarily serves to expiate her sins.

Depiction of the body and passions in these two texts has a clear didactic purpose, providing a vivid lesson in morality and piety. In this sense it possesses an epistemological dimension as well, inasmuch as it teaches by example and uses the body and passions as a mental and imaginative path, in order to explore the nature of sin and remorse, divine mercy and love. The final goal of such a pursuit is the presence of, and unity with Christ – the prime object of desire for all three Magdalene figures. The treatment of passions and sensory experiences in these texts thus aptly reflects the general Counter-Reformation emphasis on their proper usage and primary ethical implications – that is, the need for an appropriate combination of "repressive and stimulative elements"[50] that will "solicit desired emotional and behavioural responses"[51] from the recipient community of believers.

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[49] Bunić's version of the crucifixion includes Mary's impassioned, plaintive address to the Virgin Mary, Christ and the cross, as well as the narrator's plea to Mary herself. Đurđević's account is more extensive and elaborate, and accordingly more emotional. It includes not only Mary's addresses to Christ and the Virgin Mary, but also an angry condemnation of the already dead traitor Judas, as well as the speeches by other participants: the Virgin Mary's plaints, John's lamenting report on Christ's capture and previous torture, and Peter's remorseful confession of his denial of Christ. Such a dramatic presentation of Christ's passion bears resemblance to the ritual of The Way of the Cross, and to the similar popular forms of this type of devotion.

[50] Wietse de Boer, "The Counter-Reformation of the senses", in: *The Ashgate research companion to the Counter-Reformation*, eds. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen and Mary Laven, Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2016, 254.

[51] W. de Boer, "The Counter-Reformation of the senses", 252.

All three texts repeatedly and explicitly state their moral and religious aims. In addition to the aforementioned authorial comments on the proper use of passions in the paratext, Southwell's narrator, for instance, concludes his account with an address to the reader ("O christian soule"), prompting him to follow Mary Magdalene as an example ("mirrour") of penitence, devotion and love. Bunić's poem opens with an invitation to the audience ("Oh ye mortals") to repent with Mary Magdalene's guidance and help. In a similar vein, Đurđević's narrator apostrophises "the soul" (canto 3), and later refers to the collective subject, i.e., "we" as sinners and mortals, when delivering a lesson or a warning. Both Ragusan narrators present Mary Magdalene as a model and a guide for themselves as well, in direct appeals to her and to God. Reflective and moralising passages are generally dispersed throughout these three texts, sometimes even in the form of the narrator's instructive apostrophes to the heroine herself.

Prefatory paratexts of Southwell and Đurđević provide some further guidelines in terms of their authorial intent and their texts' potential reception. Đurđević's address "To the Reader" (*Štiocu*) provides, among other things, a justifying explanation of his lengthy depiction of Mary Magdalene's earlier sinful life, as possibly disturbing content that should again serve as a mirror in order to deter young girls from committing the same errors, or at least encourage them to repentance (pp. 466-467).

Even more importantly, these paratexts offer a form of literary legitimation and self-reflexion, revealing the authors' aim of merging religious and aesthetic functions of their texts, in accordance with the Horatian precept of *docere et delectare*. Hoping that his portrayal of Mary Magdalene will be accepted as "not vnfit to entertaine well tempered humorous, both with pleasure and profit", Southwell deems literary "fables" acceptable insofar as they can contain "morall trueths, and that couertly vttered to a common good, whiche without a maske woulde not finde so free a passage". This extends to his own employment of motifs and devices from the then popular secular (love) poetry, which he openly criticises, but also modifies to fit his devotional purposes. In the prefatory dedication to his other biblical lament, the poem *Saint Peters Complaint*, Southwell aptly describes such an approach as weaving "a new webbe" in the secular poets' "owne loome", in order to "let them see the errour of their workes" and "inuite some skilfuller wits to goe forward in the same, or to begin some finer peece, wherein it may be seene how well verse and vertue sute together."[52]

Southwell's twofold, affirmative and pragmatic, view of literature was informed by the then current Jesuit theories of "writing as ministry".[53] As a member of this order, a Jesuit student and afterwards a teacher in Rome, Southwell forged his own "sacralised

[52] Robert Southwell, *Saint Peters Complaint, With other Poemes*, London, 1595, A3.

[53] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 20.

poetics"[54] in the attempt to reconcile "the exercise of priestly ministry and the production of literary texts".[55] When devoted to the transmission of the divine message and to religious and moral edification in general, the artist is in this sense sacralised as a (secondary) creator, legitimised by God's scriptural authority and example[56] to replicate his creative process.[57] What F. W. Brownlow terms as Southwell's "aesthetics of holiness"[58] hence sanctions the use of artifice, not any more perceived as a mere hindrance or an opposite to, but as a prerequisite for conveying the sacred content.[59] Southwell's literary programme was not, however, a mere elaboration of the Jesuit agenda, as it engaged in some of the key universal issues in the Western literary tradition that dated back to the antiquity and were raised again in the then contemporary debates and defences of poetry, particularly those composed in the Neoplatonic vein. The challenge of balancing between pragmatism and aesthetics, the (divine) truth and poetic "lies" or fictions, indeed became one of the major Baroque concerns.

The two Ragusan poems can also be viewed along the lines of the Jesuit and the overall Counter-Reformation view of art as an effective tool for evangelisation. Jesuits were actively involved in the religious, cultural and educational life of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dubrovnik,[60] and Ignjat Đurđević was initially a member of this order too, although he afterwards switched allegiance to join the Benedictines. Like Southwell, he expressed his views on the abovementioned issue explicitly in two prefaces. Whereas the first one, a brief dedicatory epistle to the Zadar archbishop Vicenco

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[54] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 228.

[55] Scott Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature 1561–1595: writing reconciliation*, Aldershot-Burlington: Ashgate, 2004, xiv.

[56] The preface to *Saint Peters Complaint* explicitly invokes divine authority by claiming that God, "who deliuering many parts of Scripture in verse, and, by his Apostle willing vs to exercise our deuotion in Himnes and spirituall Sonnets, warranteth the Arte to bee good, and the vse allowable" (Southwell, *Saint Peters Complaint*, A2).

[57] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 228-268; S. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature*, 169. This tradition goes back to the ancient notion of poets as prophets (cf. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, 145-146), as well as to the medieval notion of the poet as theologian (E. R. Curtius, *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 214-227).

[58] F. W. Brownlow, *Robert Southwell*, New York: Twayne Publishers; London etc.: Prentice Hall International, 1996, 41-42.

[59] This point is further elaborated by Brian Oxley: "That man is a work of art akin to a literary work is an implication of the view of God as an artificer 'whose works our wit exceed' (...) In all these instances the creative artist is God, but although Southwell gives the credit to God, it is certain that he views man's own wit and artistic faculty, created by God, as a co-worker with God in this secondary creation" (Brian William Oxley, *The poetry of an artificial man: a study of the Latin and English verse of Robert Southwell*, PhD thesis, St Andrews: Faculty of Arts of the University of St Andrews, 1985, 227).

[60] The first Jesuits arrived in Dubrovnik in the sixteenth century and set up their residence in 1604, although their presence was not continuous due to the sometimes-strained relationship with the authorities (for an informative overview of Jesuit activities in Ragusa, see e.g., Stjepan Ćosić and Mijo Korade, *Isusovci u Dubrovniku*, Zagreb: Leykam international, 2019, 5-53).

(Vicko) Zmajević, mainly aims to legitimise his writing by obtaining the patronage of such a figure of religious authority, the second preface is formulated as an authorial defence and a short comprehension guide to the presumedly benevolent reader, who is apostrophised as a "friend". The notion of poetry's "falsity" is one of the key issues discussed in this paratext – more precisely, the alleged insincerity of grieving in an ornate manner. Responding to the unnamed critics who levelled this accusation at his poem, Đurđević distinguishes "natural" (i.e., real-life) from literary expression of grief,[61] and asserts the latter's autonomy, supporting his argument with examples from tradition, selected from oral poetry and devotional literature. Đurđević's final point even goes beyond the bounds of strictly religious purposes, as he attempts to legitimise his overall writing by proclaiming as its final aim the glorification of his homeland and native language.[62]

The abovementioned dichotomies are also implicitly evoked in all three portrayals of Mary Magdalene, as they are interwoven in the very fabric of the text. The heroine's earlier indulgence in her own beauty and sensuous pleasures, whether only alluded to (Southwell) or depicted (Bunić and Đurđević), is in a way transposed onto the level of poetic expression, which is embellished in a typical Baroque fashion, with an abundance of rhetorical figures, including numerous antitheses and paradoxes. Use of these two figures is to a certain extent fostered by the content itself (the pivotal opposites of sinfulness and grace, profane love and divine love, death and life), as well as by the shared intertext of Petrarchan poetry, where they dominate the discourse. Đurđević's defence of his ornate style could here be extended to the other two examples, since all three texts demonstrate a high level of literary awareness.[63] While it may on the surface appear as a form of "sinful" poetic indulgence, their ornate style is simultaneously employed as an edifying tool that can create the desired affective response and impress upon the audience the moral and religious message more efficiently.[64]

The conjunction of affects and richly figured style, that ultimately forms the basis of the overall Early Modern "passionate discourse",[65] is furthermore inscribed in the common generic framework of these texts, cast in the then popular European mould of

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[61] "[Ne] minu je tko reče da uzdisańe Mandalijenino nije naravno i da tko plače nazbiļ svoj grijeh, nije moguć urešeno bolovati" (I. Đorđić, *Djela Ińacija Ġorġi*, 466; [My *Mandalijena*] was not spared by some who claimed that Magdalen's mourning is not natural and that those who truly weep for their sins are not able to grieve in an ornate manner).

[62] For a more detailed analysis of both prefaces, see Pavao Pavličić, "Ignjat Đurđević", in: *Skrivena teorija*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2006, 215-238.

[63] A number of earlier interpreters of Southwell's work criticised the "mannered artifice" of his style as a mere addition apparently unsuitable for religious content and purpose (F. W. Brownlow, *Robert Southwell*, 41).

[64] Cf. D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 74; D. K. Shuger, "The philosophical foundations of sacred rhetoric", 122.

[65] Cf. D. K. Shuger, "The philosophical foundations of sacred rhetoric".

the so-called literature of tears. Southwell encountered its Italian sources and models during his stay in Rome, and they were familiar to the Ragusan authors through regular cultural transfers between Croatian and Italian Early Modern literatures. In addition to their key shared source that focused on the figure of Mary Magdalene, Erasmo de Valvasone's poem *Le Lagrime della Maddalena* (1586),[66] it is worth noting that Southwell partly translated the foundational poem of the genre, Luigi Tansillo's *La Lagrime di San Pietro* (1560/1585), and later went on to render his own version of the story in *Saint Peters Complaint* (1595). Tansillo's text, moreover, served as one of the sources for the first Croatian poem of this type, Ivan Gundulić's *Suze sina razmetnoga* (*The Tears of the Prodigal Son*, 1622), which proved highly influential for the subsequent Croatian Baroque poetry of tears (often termed *plačevi* [weepings/weeping poems]) and the religious narrative/long poems in general.[67]

The generic makeup and origins of all three examples are still somewhat more complex. The letter might be broadened to encompass the aforementioned Ovidian, as well as the medieval (secular and religious) complaint tradition,[68] which was also continued in the Early Modern secular complaint poems, especially popular in English literature.[69]

While Southwell's two short Mary Magdalene lyric laments remained in the wider domain of poetry, the use of prose distinguishes his *Mary Magdalene's Funerall Teares* even further from its two Croatian counterparts. Its expression nevertheless borders on the poetic, and it has accordingly been classified as a prose poem,[70] as well as a prose

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[66] The two Croatian poems are more indebted to this source than Southwell's text is (for a brief overview of Valvasone's poem, see e.g., J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 221-227; S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, 266-267; and for Bunić's poem and its relation to this and a number of other Italian sources, cf. D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 60-69).

[67] See Pavao Pavličić, "Neke zajedničke crte baroknih *plačeva*", in: *Rasprave o hrvatskoj baroknoj književnosti*, Split: Čakavski sabor, 1979, 105-128; Pavao Pavličić, "Poema", in: *Hrvatska književna enciklopedija. Sv. 3*, ed. Velimir Visković, Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2011, 392-393. In addition to Bunić's and Đurđević's poems, other key examples include Antun Kanižlić's *Sveta Rožalija* (*Saint Rosalia*, eighteenth century), that echoes but also modifies the "tears-poetry" tradition, and, outside its bounds, Junije Palmotić's mystic poem *Katarina Sijenska* (*Saint Catherine of Siena*, seventeenth century; for this poem, see Brković, "Saintly love of Saint Catherine").

[68] Of particular importance here is one of the religious subspecies, the *planctus Mariae*, the Virgin Mary's lamentations by the cross (for Southwell, cf. E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 114-115, and for Đurđević cf. Terezija Kordić, *Analiza teoloških motiva u "Uzdasima Mandalijene pokornice" Ignjata Đurđevića*, master's thesis, Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2023, 20-21).

[69] See Emily A. Ransom, "Complaint as reconciliation in the literary mission of Robert Southwell", in: *Precarious identities: studies in the work of Fulke Greville and Robert Southwell*, ed. Vassiliki Markidou, Afroditi-Maria Panaghis, London-New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, 172-204; E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion"; and for possible parallels with Croatian literature, L. Škopljanac, "Sižejna izgradnja poeme", 43-44.

[70] Pierre Janelle, *Robert Southwell the writer: a study in religious inspiration*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1935, 191; A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 44, 125.

meditation[71] and a treatise,[72] and its partial similarity to the homily can be traced back to its Latin source *De Beata Maria Magdalena*.[73] Notwithstanding such generic nuances, both Southwell's biblical complaints provided the key impetus for the development of English "literature of tears", with a number of followers of Catholic and Protestant persuasion (including Gervase Markham, who reworked *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares* in verse).[74]

Southwell played an indispensable role in the overall rise of the English religious literature in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, particularly of its meditative strain.[75] The shaping influence of meditation as an intense mental and spiritual experience is evident in Southwell's and in the two Ragusan portrayals of Mary Magdalene, especially Đurđević's. One of their major and highly influential common precedents was developed by the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius Loyola. His meditative method was based on intense self-searching and visualisation, highlighting the importance of "emotional response as a legitimate way to experience God, and the recollected memory of that response as a methodology for Jesuit witness and ministry".[76] As an expression of the Jesuit "incarnational spirituality",[77] this method resonated well with the Baroque penchant for strong affective responses and their captivating and memorable artistic representation,[78] while also supplying a path for profound reflection

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[71] S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, 267; P. Badir, *The maudlin impression*, 65.

[72] Paul Cefalu, "*Noli me tangere* and the reception of Mary Magdalene in Early Modern England", in: Paul Cefalu, *The Johannine Renaissance in Early Modern English literature and theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 27.

[73] As has already been noted, Gary Kuchar views Southwell's homiletic framework as a means of containing Augustinian excess of passion. The earlier assumptions that Southwell's text was originally intended and delivered as a sermon have now been dismissed (F. W. Brownlow, *Robert Southwell*, 40). It is worth noting that the notions of the sermon and the homily were not identical in Post-Reformation England, where, as H. Yip maintains, the printed homily "was not always a simple sermon for unskilled preachers, but was fluid in its function as doctrinal pamphlet, polemical treatise and devotional text" (Hannah Yip, "What was a homily in Post-Reformation England?", *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 72/1 (2020), 69).

[74] For an overview, see e.g., Alison Shell, *Catholicism, controversy and the English literary imagination, 1558-1660*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 56-104.

[75] This fact was foregrounded in the previously quoted Louis Martz's study (*The poetry of meditation*), an important milestone in the study of Southwell's and English religious poetry in general, even though it has in the meantime been critically re-examined, elaborated as well as disputed on the grounds of simplification (see e.g., G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*, 265, note 80; Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the poetic imagination in Early Modern England*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 61-61; P. Cefalu, "*Noli me tangere*", 29).

[76] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 8.

[77] S. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature*, 154.

[78] One of the key components of the Ignatian meditative method was the "composition of place", a clear and focused mental presentation of a specific topic, such as the crucifixion or Mary Magdalene's wake by Christ's grave (cf. J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 83; A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 49; M. R. Benedict, *The Ministry of passion and meditation*, 52). Loyola's pivotal (albeit not exclusive) influence in this respect has become a critical commonplace in literature on Southwell.

on "aspects of the individual's relationship with God, including extensive visualisations of the Passion of Christ".[79] In other words, it provided an apt form of individual and impassioned devotion that fitted in well with the Counter-Reformation agenda of evangelisation, as a complement to communal liturgical rites and rituals.[80]

The spiritual experience in all three texts is, moreover, elevated to the higher stage of mystical converse and union with God, already reached by the heroine and desired by the narrator for himself and/or for his audience. Their similar use of amorous discourse in reference to Mary Magdalene's union with Christ[81] was also common in the Christian mystical tradition, having been canonised by the well-known and influential interpretation of the biblical *Song of Songs* by Bernard de Clairvaux,[82] whose meditational practice in general provided an important precedent for the Jesuit and wider Early Modern tradition.[83]

Through her mystical union with Christ, the figure of Mary Magdalene evolved into an allegorical representation of the human soul longing for God,[84] which transcends her traditional and popular (Baroque) image of a sensuous penitent. While this image is to a varying extent still present in the three analysed texts, it is hence upgraded to further levels of symbolic meaning. Since Bunić's poem is more focused on presenting a vivid narrative of Mary Magdalene's earthly life until Christ's resurrection, her mystical experience and significance are not presented in detail, but they are explicitly evoked in several references, as well as implicitly foreshadowed in the heroine's powerful desire for Christ's presence during his life on earth. Southwell also depicts Magdalene's passion for Christ prior to his ascension, with only a concluding announcement of her later heavenly bliss, which stresses that Christ "made the period of her expiring griefes (...) the preamble to her nowe entring, and neuer ending pleasures" (p. 67). Along similar lines, the narrator's earlier comments accentuate the true, symbolic and spiritual, significance of Magdalene's passion, prompting her to surpass the senses and interiorise love and faith. His speculation on the meaning of Christ's initial prohibition of touch, for instance, makes this point explicit:

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[79] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 19.

[80] On the importance of, sometimes overlooked, "individual affective experience" in the Counter-Reformation devotion, see e.g., Anne Boemler and Bryan Brazeau, "Tears in heaven: tracing the contours of a Pan-European transconfessional genre", *Humanities* 11/4 (2022), 2.

[81] Both Croatian poems employ bridal imagery, that is, the notion of heavenly marriage as the traditional metaphor for mystical union, Christ being Mary's "heavenly bridegroom" (Bunić, canto 3) and she his "heavenly bride" (Đurđević, canto 5; cf. also T. Kordić, *Analiza teoloških motiva*, 33).

[82] Cf. Diana Marie Shaw, "'Such fire is love': the Bernardine poetry of St. Robert Southwell, S. J.", *Christianity & literature* 62/3 (2013), 333-354; D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 172-173; I. Brković, "Saintly love of Saint Catherine", 104.

[83] Cf. D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 76; D. M. Shaw, "'Such fire is love'", 343.

[84] D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 75-76; F. W. Brownlow, *Robert Southwell*, 43; D. M. Shaw, "'Such fire is love'".

> O Jesu what mystery is in this? (...) with forbidding her to touch thee, as if thou haddest said.
>
> O Mary know the difference betweene a glorious and a mortall body, betweene the condition of a momentary and of an eternall life (...) embrace me first in a firme faith, and then thou shalt touch me with more worthy hands. It is now necessary to weane thee from the comfort of my externall presence, that thou maist learne to lodge mee in the secretes of thy heart, and teach thy thoughts to supply the offices of the outward senses. (...). but what thy eie then seeth not, thy heart shall feele, and my silent parly will find audience in thy inward eare (pp. 61-63).

The closing address reiterates this lesson, inviting the reader, i.e., the "Christian soul", to follow Mary's example of a constant search for Christ in terms of their individual repentance and conversion, faith, hope and love.

Đurđević's poem offers the most extensive portrayal of Mary Magdalene's spiritual and mystical experience, as well as of its theological implications. The heroine, for instance, contemplates the nature of divine mercy (canto 5), as well as of human and divine love (canto 7), while her heavenly vision in the final canto (8) comprises her inner speculation on the divine essence, which ultimately remains beyond human comprehension and power of articulation, accessible only through complete surrender in love – a conclusion consonant with the so-called negative theology and apophatic discourse, common in mystical experience and writing.[85] According to Đurđević's prefatory address to the reader, the extent of the protagonist's theological knowledge was such that he felt obliged to justify it by her discipleship of Christ, in another response to the unnamed critics who apparently deemed it unconvincing and improbable for a woman (p. 466). Đurđević's dedication to the archbishop Zmajević is further indicative in this respect, as Mary Magdalene is here explicitly called *apostolorum apostola* (in reference to St. Jerome's writings)[86] and symbolically linked with the archbishop as a figure of theological and pastoral authority, and a similarly "fervent lover of the Highest" (p. 463).

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[85] K. Šimić, "*Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice*", 133-134. Negative theology and its accompanying apophatic discourse paradoxically reduce knowledge to non-knowledge, emphasising that it is only possible to ascertain and articulate what God is not, since his essence remains beyond human comprehension (for a wider discussion, see e. g., Alen Širca, *Teopoetika. Študije o krščanskem mističnem pesništvu*, Ljubljana: KUD Logos, 2019, 13-116).

[86] Đurđević is probably referring to Jerome's commentary on the Book of Zephaniah, where he names all the women who were the first to witness Christ's resurrection as apostles to the apostles (cf. Julian R. Backes, "*Apostola apostolorum*: observations on the proper of St. Mary Magdalene in the *Breviarium praemonstratense*", *Antiphon* 21/1 (2017), 67; K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen*, 58; J. R. Anić, "Marija iz Magdale", 226-227). A reference to Mary Magdalene as the one "who was privileged to see the rising Christ first before even the apostles" can also be found in Jerome's *Epist. CXXVII ad Principiam virginem* (S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, 55; K. L. Jansen, *The making of the Magdalen*, 21, n. 9).

By interweaving different aspects of the Mary Magdalene interpretive tradition, the analysed examples thus present three specific images of this biblical character, endowing her with various layers of symbolic meaning. In particular, they (re)assert her significance as a spiritual role-model and a guide in faith and love, and in this way demonstrate the potential to re-evaluate her initial gospel image of a devout disciple and the apostle to the apostles, who had an important role in the early Church. This image can also capitalise on their appropriation of amorous discourse, in light of the exegetical tradition (again best illustrated by *The Song of Songs*) that interprets the relation between God and his chosen people – Israel and later the Christian Church – as a loving matrimonial union.[87]

Further comparison along these lines can help to uncover additional similarities and differences in the three authors' interpretations of the Mary Magdalene figure, which have proved relevant both in their immediate contexts, as well as from the wider, both historical and universal, viewpoint of the Western literary and cultural tradition.

The three portrayals of Mary Magdalene: symbolic significance and legacy

The three texts have throughout been contextualised within the Counter-Reformation imperative of spiritual renewal; however, it should be borne in mind that the Counter-Reformation itself was multifaceted in its various aspects and in different communities, where, as M. Leven points out, the "experience of the Catholic minority was different from that of the Catholic majority."[88] The two Croatian poems emerged in the predominantly Catholic context, shared by the author, narrator and the intended audience. They were nevertheless well aware of the continuing threat to their religion and community (as a free city-state) presented by the Ottoman Empire, which had conquered the majority of neighbouring territories and required constant diplomatic balancing by the authorities, causing internal disputes among the ruling classes themselves.[89]

The more homogenous Catholic context, as well as the infidel threat that could also be viewed as a form of God's punishment for sins,[90] can account for Bunić's and Đuđević's more typical, stronger emphasis on Mary Magdalene's penitence, and (partly) explain the symbolic significance of her discipleship. Bunić does not elaborate the latter, but nevertheless presents it as an important aspect of her character. Mary

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[87] Cf. D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 172.

[88] Mary Leven, "Introduction", in: *The Ashgate research companion to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, Mary Laven, Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2016, 9.

[89] For more on this issue, see e.g., Stjepan Ćosić and Nenad Vekarić, *Dubrovačka vlastela između roda i države. Salamankezi i sorbonezi*, Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2005.

[90] On the appearance and meaning of this notion in Croatian Early Modern Literature, cf. Davor Dukić, *Sultanova djeca. Predodžbe Turaka u hrvatskoj književnosti ranog novovjekovlja*, Zadar: Thema, 2004.

Magdalene's devotedness to Christ's teachings is in his case supported by a reference to her conflation with Mary of Bethany, the Mary and Martha episode from Luke's gospel, where Christ praises Mary's choice of listening to his words instead of serving him like her sister Martha (10, 38-42):[91]

> S tobom trudi, s tobom muči
> i bremena čas ne gubi
> da tvoj sveti Zakon uči,
> er goruće sasma ljubi.
>
> Razmišljan'ja nad sva dobra,
> ti nju hvaleć ču se rijeti,
> dio najbolji ona obra,
> koji neće njoj se oteti. (Bunić, canto 3, p. 172)

([Addressing Christ]: With you she labours, with you she suffers / and loses no time / to learn your holy Law / since she burns entirely with love. // For thinking of the highest good / you were heard to praise her, / having chosen the better part, / that will not be taken from her.)

Đurđević's extensive theological reflection, which reinforces more strongly her image of a figure of spiritual authority, testifies to his own authorial position of a priest. Krešimir Šimić suggests that Đurđević's poem may have been motivated by a specific theological agenda, promoted by the dedication addressee Zmajević. The archbishop undertook various efforts to strengthen Catholic faith through devotional writing, as a countermeasure to the spread of the Orthodox Church and its political instrumentalisation by the Ottoman Empire, which he perceived as a serious threat. Viewed as part of this agenda, Đurđević's texts can be read as an "apologetic religious long poem", written in defence of the "true" (Catholic) faith.[92] While such a contextual reading does not exhaust the entire interpretive potential of Đurđević's poem, it does add a new and significant dimension to it, which could find a parallel in Southwell's text.

Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares originated in a somewhat different set of circumstances, dominated by the English prosecution of non-Protestant denominations.[93] Southwell probably started to compose his text while still in Rome, but he intended it for the English audience, as part of his (Jesuit) mission of converting his home country back to the Catholic Church. Upon his arrival in England (1586), his pastoral work was largely

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[91] Southwell's narrator also refers to this episode, with a direct quotation of Christ's words, but as a cue to reflect on the meaning of Christ's promise of his permanent presence (p. 12).

[92] K. Šimić, "*Uzdasi Mandalijene pokornice*", 144-146.

[93] By the Act of Uniformity of 1559, attendance at the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer service became obligatory (Marie B. Rowlands, "Recusant women 1560–1640", in: *Women in English society, 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior, London-New York: Routledge, 1985, 112), establishing "Protestantism as England's only legal religion" (L. McClain, "'They have taken away my lord'", 80).

(albeit not exclusively) directed at the prosecuted Catholic community, ending in his early death that earned him the title of a martyr for the Catholic faith.

A number of readings have located Southwell's portrayal of Mary Magdalene within the context of his mission. According to what has now become a critical commonplace, the heroine's grief at the loss of Christ and her mourning at his empty tomb epitomises the experience of Catholic recusants, who covertly adhered to their religion and refused to attend the Church of England service, but suffered the loss of communal religious experience and rituals, especially the mass and the Eucharist.[94] The sacramental body of Christ is in this reading symbolically equated with his missing corpse, and also evoked as a form of spiritual nourishment, by the use of food imagery as a metaphor for Mary Magdalene's hunger for his presence.[95] Southwell's final address to the audience would in this sense constitute an encouraging call for spiritual (re)union with Christ without access to sacraments, and a lesson on the need for "spiritual seeing"[96] without material presence of the sacred. In a similar vein, Southwell's text and his entire literary *oeuvre* could be viewed as a form of sacramental literature, providing imaginative remembrance of the mass and the Eucharist.[97]

Southwell's primary religious allegiance did not, however, cancel out his national allegiance and concern for the spiritual welfare of the English society as a whole, which was not monolithic from a religious viewpoint, but rested on a complex and fluid relationship between different strands of Christianity.[98] Although their faith was officially proscribed, Catholic writers were thus able to exercise notable influence in the domain of devotional literature.[99] From the very start, Southwell's works were read and imitated by Catholic and Protestant authors,[100] with *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares* as one of the most popular texts (together with *Saint Peters Complaint*) that received 10 editions in the period from 1591 to 1636.[101]

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[94] See e.g., S. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature*; G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*; G. Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia"; A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*; L. McClain, "'They have taken away my lord'"; P. Badir, *The maudlin Impression*; M. R. Benedict, *The ministry of passion and meditation*; S. Read, *Eucharist and the poetic imagination*.

[95] S. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature*, 174; L. McClain, "'They have taken away my lord'", 83-84; S. Read, *Eucharist and the poetic imagination*, 50.

[96] P. Badir, *The maudlin impression*, 65.

[97] A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 236; S. Read, *Eucharist and the poetic imagination*, 42, 61-68.

[98] S. Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the mission of literature*, xxviii; Alexandra Walsham, *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain*, Farnham-Burlington: Ashgate, 2014, 30-31.

[99] For a broader overview and discussion of the position and treatment of Catholicism in Southwell's time, see e. g., Anthony Milton, "A qualified intolerance: the limits and ambiguities of early Stuart anti-Catholicism", in: *Catholicism and anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English texts*, ed. Arthur E. Marotti, Basingstoke-London: Macmillan Press, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, 85-115.

[100] Cf. e.g., M. R. Benedict, *The Ministry of passion and meditation*, 51.

[101] F. W. Brownlow, *Robert Southwell*, 43.

One of the reasons for its favourable reception might lie in the fact that, notwithstanding the general Protestant dislike and criticism of the cult of saints, Mary Magdalene was still relatively positively perceived as a figure of a sinner forgiven through her faith alone, in accordance with the reformed theology's doctrine of salvation.[102] Paul Cefalu's recent interpretation uncovered a more specific common point with the contemporary Protestant writings, which brings into question the exclusive emphasis on Southwell's symbolic representation of the recusant Catholic experience and his presumed appeal for spiritual seeing as the true union with Christ. By uncovering the hitherto overlooked aspect of Southwell's intertextual foundations in John's gospel, Cefalu focuses on Christ's prohibition of touch in the garden scene as the interpretive key of this episode and the entire text, reading it as a lesson to Mary Magdalene on the importance of hearing over seeing. By means of a typical Johannine "ironic method of productive misunderstanding as a means of revelation",[103] Southwell in fact represents Mary Magdalene's epistemological failure, that is, her misunderstanding of Christ's earlier words and his promise of resurrection, which is rectified in his final revelation – a point that could resonate well with the Protestant accent on verbal, i.e., scriptural access to the divine.[104]

On the other hand, Southwell's text could cater to the Protestant audience even through its divergence from their religious tenets, filling a receptive and emotional gap created by the Protestant disapproval of excessive display of affections,[105] while also tapping into the commonly shared tradition of Christian late medieval affective devotion.[106] The depiction of Mary Magdalene's affective and rational faculties and (mis) perceptions could in any case offer a suitable response to the need to reconceptualise individual devotion in the midst of an emerging trend of desacralisation and secularisation of society that would take a stronger hold in the following centuries.[107] Gary Kuchar describes this response in terms of "divine subjection" or construction of early modern religious subjects exclusively through their relation to God, and not (any more) to political or social authorities. While Southwell's specific circumstances highlighted the

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[102] L. McClain, "'They have taken away my lord'", 93; for a more detailed account, see P. C. Almond, *Mary Magdalene*, 191-205.

[103] P. Cefalu, "*Noli me tangere*", 98.

[104] P. Cefalu, "*Noli me tangere*", 98. To the degree that the heroine in all three analysed texts figures as a disciple who listened to, transmitted and responded to Christ's words, the Croatian poems could also be said to echo the abovementioned Johannine intertext, albeit articulated from somewhat different angles.

[105] E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 109-110. Such a view was particularly emphasised in the then influential Calvinist doctrine. It also informed Calvin's own and less favourable opinion of Mary Magdalene, whom he criticised for excessive tears and her focus on Christ's physical body (E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion", 108-110).

[106] E. A. Ransom, "Complaint as reconciliation"; E. A. Ransom, "Passions and the passion".

[107] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 185; G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*.

importance of this issue in view of his abovementioned conflicting allegiances, such an interpretive framework could accommodate the two Ragusan poems, together with the related examples from the European "literature of tears", and religious literature in general. This tendency is eventually inseparable from the wider context of Early Modern identity formation as a process that was simultaneously oriented inwardly and outwardly (i.e., towards various religious, cultural, social and political institutions and authorities).[108]

While all three portrayals help to position Mary Magdalene outwardly, in a recognisable religious, and indirectly also literary- and cultural-historical context, they show a notable move towards the inner perspective, providing a deeper psychological insight into the protagonist's character.[109] Presentation of her heightened emotional state and inward moral distress complements her universal dimension of a (legendary) role-model, allowing her to be read as a relatable embodiment of the new Early Modern sinful and "impassioned" self, and a source of inspiration for individual devotion.[110] Narrative perspective plays an important role in this respect, as all three texts give voice to Mary Magdalene herself, in monologues and speeches to other characters – primarily to Christ, who is often merely an implied, silent and/or absent, addressee, and to the Virgin Mary in the Ragusan texts.

The narrator features as an equally significant figure, who is emotionally and morally involved in the story, and possesses a high degree of autoreflexivity. In addition to the reflexive and instructive comments, sometimes included in his apostrophes to the reader, all three narrators address God and the protagonist. In the Croatian texts, these passages usually contain a plea for guidance and help for their own salvation, and in Đurđević's case for the composition of the poem as well, in the two invocations (cantos 1 and 8). Bunić's apostrophes to Mary Magdalene can also be instructive, and this tendency is even more pronounced in Southwell's text, where the narrator often tries to reason with the protagonist in order to dispel her misconceptions and excessive grief.

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108 Such a notion of the two-sided process of identity formation has been forwarded by the more recent cultural history, and lies at the core, for instance, of R. von Dülmen's idea of the (Renaissance) discovery of the individual (Richard van Dülmen, *Die Entdeckung des Individuums: 1500-1800*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), or of S. Greenblatt's "self-fashioning" (Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*, Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

109 For Southwell, see also e.g., J. Gibaldi, *The Baroque muse*, 153-154; A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 146, 151-157; G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*, 60; G. Kuchar, "Gender and Recusant melancholia", 144; for Bunić, see e.g., D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 81.

110 A. Sweeney, *Robert Southwell*, 154-155.

The dialogical form creates a multiperspectival narrative that helps to build a more dynamic and complex image of Mary Magdalene.[111] What is at issue here is not merely her voice, but her gender, which was not easily acceptable for a figure who could be said to embody the Early Modern religious subjectivity[112] and, what is more, spiritual eminence. The traditional misogynist discourse that considered women as inherently sinful and lascivious, epitomised in the image of Eve as a seductress and the perpetrator of the original sin, is incorporated into the Mary Magdalene's composite image. However, her original gospel character possesses potential for female empowerment and female agency, which is preserved in the three analysed texts. Southwell's narrator, among other things, acknowledges her status of a privileged witness to Christ's resurrection even through her error of judgement, as he expounds on the traditional typological interpretation of the *hortulanus* scene, where Christ figures as the new Adam:[113]

> For this also was Mary permitted to mistake [Christ for a gardener], that we might be informed of the mystery, and see how aptly the course of our redemption did answere the processe of our condemnation (p. 47).

Bunić's protagonist is similarly depicted as the one worthiest to see the resurrected Christ first, being the "most enflamed by love" for him and the most persevering of his followers. Although Đurđević does not describe the encounter on the morning of resurrection, his Mary Magdalene is privileged even to a higher degree, as she is granted spiritual access to the heavenly realm before her final ascension, where she embarks on an inner spiritual quest.

Feminist theology of the last decades has brought to the light the importance of women and female apostolate both in the early church and in the following centuries, which was usually supressed in historical accounts. This fact bears a specific significance in Southwell's case, considering that recusant Catholic women played an analogous role, secretly harbouring and supporting priests, and abiding by their faith at the cost of potential death. Despite their vital contribution, such a role could nevertheless create anxiety over female empowerment and female agency,[114] whose traces might

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[111] Southwell inherited the dialogical structure from his Latin source homily, but elaborated it further, partly also inspired by the Ignatian meditation practice, which was devised in a form of colloquy, as well as by the Johannine devices of dramatic irony and discussion (P. Cefalu, "*Noli me tangere*"). Multi-voiced structure, with the protagonist's monologues, is a common feature of the Croatian poetry of tears and can be found in the Italian poems of this type as well. For a more detailed analysis of Bunić's narrative structure, see D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 69-82; and of Đurđević's, see Julijana Matanović, *Barok iz suvremenosti gledat (Primarna i sekundarna generička obilježja u Đorđićevim "Uzdasima Mandalijene pokornice")*, Osijek: Revija izdavački centar Otvorenog sveučilišta Osijek, 1992.

[112] D. K. Shuger, *Scholarship, sacrifice, and subjectivity*, 191.

[113] Cf. also J. R. Anić, "Marija iz Magdale", 128.

[114] G. Kuchar, *Divine subjection*; G. Kuchar, "Gender and recusant melancholia"; M. B. Rowlands, "Recusant women".

be visible in Southwell's narrator's superiority to her own voice.[115] Despite this, as well as the fact that both Croatian poems still rely on the appeal of the sensuous penitent, all three portrayals of Mary Magdalene in varying degrees cross the boundaries of the patriarchal misogynist discourse and its insistence on female inferiority and subordination, following the tradition of positive Christian female images, such as mystics and learned women. This makes their individual contributions relevant to the overall Mary Magdalene tradition, and specifically to its Early Modern segment, but also to the contemporary discussions on the need for more equality and a more active role of women in the church.[116]

The history of Mary Magdalene's representations in the Western literature and culture has turned her into a multilayered figure of cultural memory, inscribed with different meanings. This has finally allowed her to function, in the words of Patricia Badir, as the privileged site for reflection on "the commemorative form and mnemonic function of religious art" itself,[117] which strikes at "the very core of Christian representational practice"[118] and its, often uneasy, balancing between the sacred truth and artistic fiction. Such preoccupations have left their mark on all three texts, as well as in Southwell's and Đurđević's paratexts. The heroine's mnemonic function is more pronounced in Southwell's case, which could again be related to his immediate context, where religious art became a form of another mourned-for absence, following its condemnation and proscription by the Protestant majority.[119] However, all three Mary Magdalene figures could be said to function as symbolic custodians of Christ's sacramental sacrifice and his teachings, who abide by him at all times, and as such continue to provide a role model and spiritual guidance for the narrators, authors and the intended readers. The analysed texts themselves are thus transformed into sites of memory which take on the heroine's apostolic and pastoral role, as well as a symbolic devotional function. The aforementioned notion of Southwell's "sacralised poetics" is in this sense comparable to the amalgamation of the sacred and the aesthetic in the two Ragusan poems, and both can be metaphorically related to their common generic framework of "literature of tears". Inasmuch as the central motifs of tears and sighs here function, in the words of D. Fališevac, as "a metaphor for a work of art, the religious poem"[120] – or prose, they

[115] In addition to this, Southwell's prose contains occasional remnants of the traditional misogynist stereotypes of female excessive affectivity, foolishness and weakness. These are, however, presented with irony, since the narrator generally takes Mary Magdalene's side and praises her steadfastness in love.

[116] See Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*, 386-394.

[117] P. Badir, *The maudlin impression*, 3-4.

[118] P. Badir, *The maudlin impression*, 8.

[119] P. Badir, *The maudlin impression*, 9, 64. Mary's concern at the possible loss of memory of Christ reappears as a leitmotif throughout the text.

[120] D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 78.

reinforce the equation of an act of writing with an act of repentance (in the Ragusan texts), and, even more importantly for all three examples, with an expression of faith and love, that belongs to the realm of the aesthetic and is achieved "by the means of the aesthetic".[121] It should also be borne in mind that these texts evolved in close contact with secular literature, especially its amorous tradition, which treated women as the privileged aesthetic objects, with Petrarchan and Neoplatonic idealisation of their physical and spiritual beauty, which could again function as a means of legitimising and sanctifying the very act of its literary representation.

While the three analysed texts share a common Catholic orientation and a number of indicative features, their approaches to Mary Magdalene have at the same time shown significant divergences: Đurđević's and Bunić's approach was more typical of the wider European Counter-Reformation tendencies, whereas Southwell responded to his specific English context, presenting a heroine that is not predominantly a repentant sinner but a "type of constancy and perseverance".[122] On the other hand, Southwell's and Đurđević's texts were somewhat less interested in building up a captivating narrative in comparison to Bunić's, and more in theological, as well as in reflection on the protagonist's spiritual and mental state. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that all three representations possess a universal dimension that finally cuts across confessional, cultural and historical divides, making them still relevant for contemporary discussions on the (im)possibilities of female agency and empowerment on the one hand, as well as on the complex relation between literature, religion and society on the other.

[121] D. Fališevac, *Ivan Bunić Vučić*, 78.

[122] S. Read, *Eucharist and the poetic imagination*, 48.