Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque

Edited by

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PART THREE

NOLI ME TANGERE: MARY MAGDALENE, THE WITNESS

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GAZE IN THE GARDEN: MARY MAGDALENE IN *NOLI ME TANGERE*¹

Barbara Baert

Perhaps no other utterance by Christ has been the subject of as much discussion by the first Church Fathers as '*Noli me tangere*.' Spoken to Mary Magdalene upon her recognition of him after the resurrection, what did this phrase actually mean? Frequently represented in the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, how did the scene of the *Noli me tangere* shape the reception of the Magdalene in the Middle Ages? In considering the iconography of the *Noli me tangere* the point of departure is the relationship between the scene's textual source, exegesis, and its representation. Focusing on the relationship between word and image, the first part of this essay examines the perception of physicality and the corporeal boundaries between the genders in Martin Schongauer's engraving of the *Noli me tangere* (1475–1480) (fig. 7.1). A closer reading of this images also reveals the essential features of the *Noli me tangere*, including the 'threshold between two worlds' and the 'compensatory gaze.'² The second part of this essay will explore the genesis of the *Noli me tangere* in iconography and identify the highlights of cyclical iconography in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy. Thus, the Mary Magdalene of the *Noli me tangere* becomes a case study for the cultural historiography of functional and contextual shifts in the western European perception of the ban on touching and the impact of this ban on the dominant medieval views on the appearance of Christ. Finally, a comparative examination of the character of the *Noli me*

¹ This article was written in the context of the international research project *Mary Magdalene and the Touching of Jesus. An Intra- and Interdisciplinary Investigation of the Interpretation of John 20, 17 in Exegesis, Iconography and Pastoral Care*, of the Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek—Vlaanderen (2004–9), which involved in addition to the author, Reimund Bieringer, Karlijn Demasure and Ine Van Den Eynde. I am obliged to our scientific staff member Liesbet Kusters and Emma Sidgwick.

² Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, inv. dutuit 8632; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe; Sophie Renouare de Bussierre, *Martin Schongauer. Maître de la gravure Rhénane, vers 1450–1491* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1991), 160; A. Hyatt Mayor, *Prints and People* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1971), cat. no. 455–60; Alan Shestack, *Fifteenth Century Engravings of Northern Europe* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1967).

Fig. 7.1. Martin Schongauer, *Noli me tangere*, 1475–1480, burin engraving. British Museum, London. Photo: British Museum, London.

tangere in Italy and the Low Countries forms the basis for new interpretations of the iconographic characteristics of the image.

WORD AND IMAGE

'*Noli me tangere*,' one of the most significant Gospel passages, has had a complex history in exegetical writings. John 20:11–18 describes Mary Magdalene's desire to embalm Christ's body and her discovery of an empty grave.³ Two angels ask her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Mary

³ The text mentions 'Mary.' Here, for clarity, I will use Mary Magdalene, the name and person handed down by tradition (see below).

Magdalene replies, "Because they have taken away my Lord." Then she turns around, seeing a gardener, who asks her: "Woman, why weepest thou?" Mary Magdalene begs, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." The man answers, "Mary." She turns around once again and recognizes the man: "*Rabboni!*" To which Christ replies, in the famous verse 17, "Touch me not" (*Noli me tangere*). He goes on to explain that he has not yet returned to the Father. Finally, he asks Mary Magdalene to tell the apostles what she saw.

It is important to recognize that the original language of this text was Greek. According to the Greek texts, Christ's words to Mary Magdalene were written as *me mou haptou*.⁴ In the Greek language the infinitive *haptēin* implies not only the physical act of touching, but also the metaphorical sense of 'do not cling to me.' This conjugation also implies an action that takes place over time: in essence, stop doing what you are doing. In the Vulgate translation the phrase *Noli me tangere* replaced *me mou haptou*, shifting the original meaning of the Greek phrase. In the west, this shift greatly affected the visual representations of the scene as the emphasis was placed on the physical connotations of "touch me not." In visual representations of the *Noli me tangere* episode, the tactility of the phrase became an essential ingredient. Along with the Greek phrase, the Latin is linguistically complex. *Nolere* is the infinitive of 'to not wish.' What the Latin really says is therefore 'Do not wish to touch me.' In other words, *Noli me tangere* refers to the demand to stop the *desire* to touch under the given circumstances. The desire that must yield then becomes an underlying emotion in the iconography.

The reason behind Christ's prohibition on touching has been an issue of debate in the history of the interpretation of the *Noli me tangere*.⁵ In John 20:17, Christ himself offered a possible explanation in the gospel text, 'for I am not yet ascended to my Father.' Medieval and early modern exegesis on the authority of Augustine (354–430), accepted that *Noli me*

⁴ For an introduction to the exegetic and linguistic complexity, including the most bibliography, see Reimund Bieringer, "Mary Magdalene in the Four Gospels," *The Bible Today* 43 (2005): 34–41 and Reimund Bieringer, "*Noli me tangere* and the New Testament: an exegetical approach," in *Noli me tangere. Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images*, ed. Barbara Baert et al., (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 13–28.

⁵ For historical-exegetic studies of John 20: 17, see Anthony Dupont and Ward Depril, "Marie-Madeleine et Jean 20,17 dans la littérature patristique latine," *Augustiniana* 56 (2006): 159–82; Richard Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition* (Bern: Lang, 1993), 147–218; R. Nürnberg, "Apostolae Apostolorum. Die Frauen am Grab als erste Zeuginnen der Auferstehung in der Väterexegese," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 23 (1996): 228–42.

tangere was an explicit statement of the transformation of the belief in Christ as *a human being* into the belief in Christ as *God*.⁶ According to this interpretation, the paired concepts of touching/non-touching correspond to the double nature of Christ. The risen, and therefore, divine body is out of bounds.⁷ The statement '*Noli me tangere*' signifies both the arrival and return of God. Thus, the *Noli me tangere* positions the body of Christ from the viewpoint of an anthropology of the incarnation, the cycle of salvation and the divine aura.⁸

The first exegetes also recognized a gender issue in the paired concepts of touching/non-touching.⁹ According to Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), Mary Magdalene was prohibited from touching Christ because, at that moment, she lacked the capacity to grasp Christ in his risen and divine form.¹⁰ Additionally, he extrapolated from *Noli me tangere*, the phrase *noli manum adhibere maioribus*: a prohibition on teaching. He connected Mary Magdalene of John 20 with Eve, considering it logical that the first person to see the Risen Christ would be a woman, since it was a woman who committed the first sin. The Magdalene's proclamation of Christ's Resurrection to the apostles was, therefore, reparation for the first sin

⁶ *Sermo* 246 and his *Epistola* 120; Augustinus, "Epistola 120," in *Letters 100–155*, ed. Roland J. Teske and Ramsey Boniface (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2003), 129–40, esp. 137. This line of reasoning was followed in *Epistula* 50 by Paulinus of Nola (355–431); Paulinus Nolanus, "Epistula 50," in *Epistulae. Paulinus von Nola. Uebersetzt und ungeleitet von Matthias Skeb*, ed. Matthias Skeb, vol. 25/3 of *Fontes Christiani* (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 1042–75, esp. 1067.

⁷ Of course, this point of view contrasts with the passage of John 20: 24–31, where Thomas does touch the body of the Risen Christ. When Thomas touches the wound, he feels and believes on the basis of a touch that *satisfies* him. The story of Thomas relies on the verification principle of the tactile sense and the *testis* argument, of which there are variations. The men of Emmaus do not recognise Christ by his voice, nor by touch, but by the dramatic action of the breaking of the bread (see fig. 7.2). Mary Magdalene already believed (why would she need to touch?), but she still had to integrate the insight into the cycle of the Resurrection by renouncing an overly narrow physical concept: the human body of Christ. *Noli me tangere* is therefore more than the story of Thomas, because the first passage also explicates the meaning of the incarnation. For a further elaboration, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 61 (2006): 13–35.

⁸ These reflections are continued by Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere. Essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Bayard, 2003), 28: '*ce qui ne doit pas être touché, c'est le corps ressuscité.*'

⁹ Harold W. Attridge, "Don't be touching me: recent feminist scholarship on Mary Magdalene," in *A Feminist Companion to John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 140–66.

¹⁰ Ambrosius Mediolanensis, "Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam," in vol. 14 of *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), 345–400, esp. 383–200.

committed by Eve.¹¹ Elsewhere, Ambrose compared the *Noli me tangere* to a gate that is still too narrow for the female capacity to believe in the Resurrection.¹² When the body is considered from an anthropological viewpoint of the incarnation, the cycle of salvation and the divine aura, the *Noli me tangere* identifies the female gender with the taboo on touching. Christ's ban on touching had to occur to provide the female gender with the ability to comprehend the physical concept of the Resurrection and the Risen Christ.

Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) proposed a less demeaning interpretation of the *Noli me tangere* for women. He connected John 20:17 with the Song of Songs 3:1–4.¹³ Just like Martha, Mary is the *apostola apostolorum* sent by Christ to redeem Eve's sin. Mary Magdalene is *Ecclesia*, the proclaimer of salvation, or the New Eve. She seeks her bridegroom as the Church seeks her faithful. In short, the woman of the *Noli me tangere* is also the woman who is elected to receive an insight into the incarnation, the cycle of salvation, and the divine aura. The paradox of Mary Magdalene in the *Noli me tangere* is therefore that both taboo and election fell on her.

Moving into the realm of late medieval art, it becomes obvious that visual images developed their own conventions for representing the *Noli me tangere* when compared to the original Gospel passages and exegetical writings. Martin Schongauer's engraving of the *Noli me tangere* is representative of the discrepancies that occurred between word and image. In Schongauer's representation, Mary Magdalene and Christ exchange glances in a garden. Their gazes interlock while their hands engage in a reserved, non-touching interplay. Schongauer positions both of the figures' right hands on a vertical axis that cuts exactly through the middle of the composition. This central axis is rhythmically emphasized by the jar of ointment and the withered tree.¹⁴ Mary Magdalene is kneeling on the

¹¹ Per os mulieris mors ante processerat, per os mulieris vita reparatur.

¹² *De fide libri V ad Gratianum Augustum*, 4, 2; Ambrosius Mediolanensis, "De fide ad Gratianum," in vol. 47/1 of *Fontes Christiani* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 212.

¹³ *In canticum canticorum* 25, 2, 45; Gérard Garitte, *Traité d'Hippolyte sur David et Goliath, sur le cantique des cantiques et sur l' antéchrist—version Géorgienne*, vol. 264 of *Corpus scriptorum christianorum Orientalium* (Leuven: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1965), 45–49; see also Victor Saxer, "Marie Madeleine dans le commentaire d'Hippolyte sur le cantique des cantiques," *Revue bénédictine* 101 (1991): 219–39.

¹⁴ The tree is a *pars pro toto* for the context of the garden where the scene took place. But the tree can also have a symbolic meaning. From the early centuries of Christianity, the tree is seldom a neutral motif in religious iconography. It evokes paradise, with both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Good and Evil, and it evokes the heavenly Jerusalem

edge of a small rise, slightly above the ground where Christ is standing. Regardless of the narrow distance between Christ and Mary Magdalene, with his left foot turned out he seems to move away from her along a descending path. Further emphasizing the separation between the two figures is the jagged line of the hill on which the Magdalene kneels. In the analysis of the composition of Schongauer's *Noli me tangere*, it becomes evident that the artist wanted to communicate a feeling of 'separation' on the one hand, while simultaneously emphasizing the words of *Noli me tangere* in the Gospel by focusing on the figures' hands.

The metaphor of the 'threshold' that separates the two characters is an interesting key to the visual structure of the *Noli me tangere*. The *Noli me tangere* shows the borderline between two bodies, between a man and a woman, but at the same time, it affirms a transformation. On the threshold of the *Noli me tangere*, the transforming body reveals itself, 'for I am not yet ascended to my Father.' Finally, the threshold itself lies at the level of temporal perception. For the *Noli me tangere* stands at the gate of Christ's departure, of his eternal fusion with God. The philosopher and Derrida expert Zsuzsa Baross commented on this aspect of the *Noli me tangere*, 'The impossible, glorious mad scenario that unfolds in John's Gospel as stage takes place right on the limit, on the threshold of the empty tomb, but also of time, of death.'¹⁵

Along with the threshold, the visual language of the *Noli me tangere* is mostly a matter of hands. In the pairs of hands, the desire and the prohibition lay in a single zone. As in the engraving by Schongauer, the hands often constitute the compositional center of the *Noli me tangere* scene, 'the central tension of the image' is what Georges Didi-Huberman calls this zone.¹⁶ The almost-touching takes place in the deictic void.¹⁷ There,

where the Tree of Life returns. The Church Fathers considered Christ's cross to be a reference to both trees. In the context of Mary Magdalene, the tree clarifies the typology with Eve. Petrus Chrysologus (d. c. 450) formulated a connection between the tree and the Holy Sepulchre, between Eve and Mary Magdalene. The tree remains a compositional element throughout the history of the development of the *Noli me tangere*; Stephen Jerome Reno, *The Sacred Tree as an Early Christian Literary Symbol. A Phenomenological Study* (Saarbrücken: Homo et religio, 1978), 106, and *passim*.

¹⁵ Z. Baross, "Noli me tangere for Jacques Derrida," *Angelaki. Journal of the theoretical humanities* 6/2 (1999): 149–64, esp. 154.

¹⁶ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico, Dissemblance and Figuration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14.

¹⁷ This is the hand that withdraws and indicates at the same time. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. B. Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 275, therefore redefines the *Noli me tangere* as a *Noli me frangere*.

in the pulsating lacuna of hands that seek and recede is where the mysterious merger of speech and gaze takes place. *Noli me tangere* is an iconography of direct speech. It derives its title directly from the spoken word. The visualization of these three words represents a given moment in time. Images must convey the emotional impact of the prohibition on touching to the spectator in a single glance. The physical pathos discussed above plays a crucial role in this. Where the tactile sense is barred, sight is heightened. *La main est parfois comparée à l'œil: elle voit*.¹⁸ The ban on touching conserves energy for the gaze. 'Touch me not' echoes in 'Touch me with your eyes.' For these reasons, Schongauer stressed the eye contact between Mary Magdalene and Christ and positioned their hands near one another but not touching. Hands and eyes mirror one another in the iconography.

The gaze became one of the most significant features of representations of the *Noli me tangere*. The exchange of looks between Mary Magdalene and Christ encompasses different perceptions of the body, or different sequences narrated in chapter 20 of the Gospel of John. Which body does Mary Magdalene see *successively*? She *sees* the gardener, whom she does not identify as an individual. She *recognizes* her *Rabboni* and wants to touch him. And finally, in the *Noli me tangere* she is able to *behold* the Son who is returning to the Father.

Significantly, Schongauer's engraving represents Christ with the stigmata. While this detail is not mentioned in texts, it brings additional meaning to visual images of the *Noli me tangere*. Along with the stigmata, the vexillum of the Resurrection that he carries infers that he is neither the gardener nor Rabboni, but the risen Christ: the third moment of *beholding* and recognition (and not the two former moments of *seeing* and *recognizing*). In the tradition of the *Noli me tangere* iconography, this third manifestation of Christ is prominent, although hybrid forms are found, and, in particular, on the eve of modernity, we see a revaluation of the 'human' Christ as the gardener and/or as *Rabboni*.

THE GENESIS OF "NOLI ME TANGERE" ICONOGRAPHY

In the visual analysis of Martin Schongauer's engraving, a number of notable characteristics of the *Noli me tangere* emerge, including the

¹⁸ J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, "Main," in *Dictionnaire des symboles* (Paris: R. Laffont, 2002), 599–603, esp. 602.

insight-generating gaze and the three different ways of perceiving. How these iconographical features evolved in the development of the *Noli me tangere* theme is an important question to consider. The subsequent exploration of the development of the *Noli me tangere* iconography considers whether or not the problems associated with the body and gender can be positioned on a historic timeline.

While the origins and pervasiveness of *Noli me tangere* imagery is still being investigated, scholarship has established that the subject first appeared in the tenth century.¹⁹ Before this time, the story of the Resurrection was represented in other manners. A common way to visualize the Resurrection, evident in an ivory from Munich (c. 400), was by depicting two or three *myrrhophores* or myrrh-bearers at the tomb (Mark 16:1–8,

¹⁹ An exception would be a disputable *Noli me tangere* on the so-called Brivio cap-sella (a silver reliquary) from the early Christian period and preserved in Paris, Musée du Louvre; see; Galit Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38–61, fig. 3. The following monographs have not been published: Anna Trotzig, “*Christus Resurgens Apparet Mariae Magdalena. En ikonografisk studie med tonvikt på motivets framställning i den tidiga medeltidens konst*,” (PhD diss., University of Stockholm, 1973); M. LaRow, “The Iconography of Mary Magdalene. The Evolution in Western Tradition until 1300,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1982); M. Lehmann, “*Die Darstellungen des Noli me tangere in der italienischen Kunst vom 12. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert. Eine ikonographische Studie*,” (PhD diss., s.l., 1988); C.L. Robertson, “Gender relations and the *Noli me tangere* scene in Renaissance Italy,” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 1993). With permission from the author, we were able to consult Lisa Marie Rafanelli, “The Ambiguity of Touch. Saint Mary Magdalene and the ‘*Noli me Tangere*’ in Early Modern Italy,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2004). The emphasis of this study is on the 15th and 16th centuries in Italy. For the published studies consult Gertrud Schiller, *Die Auferstehung und Erhöhung Christi*, vol. 3 of *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* (Mohn: Gütersloh, 1971), 88–98; Marilena Mosco et al., *La Maddalena tra Sacro e Profano. Da Giotto a De Chirico* (Firenze: La casa USHER Arnoldo Mondadori editore, 1986), 135–145, discusses examples from the 15th century; Lilia Sebastiani, *Tra/sfigurazione. Il personaggio evangelico di Maria di Magdala e il mito dell peccatrice redenta nella tradizione occidentale* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1992), 240, erroneously states that the *Noli me tangere* had an invariabile iconography; Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen. Myth and Metaphor* (London: Harper Collins, 1993) offers a *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the figure, with attention to the visual arts, but does not treat the *Noli me tangere* iconography; Daniel Arasse, “*L’excès des images*,” in *L’apparition à Marie-Madeleine*, ed. Marianne Alphant et al. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001), 79–126 offers aesthetic reflections on the Titianesque *Noli me tangere*; Diana Apostolos-Cappadonna, *In Search of Mary Magdalene. Images and Traditions* (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2002) studies later examples of the *Noli me tangere*; In Barbara Baert, “Touching with the Gaze A Visual Analysis of the *Noli me tangere*,” in *Noli me tangere. Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images*, ed. Barbara Baert (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 43–52, aspects of the text-image relationship are confronted with exegesis; In Barbara Baert, “*Noli me tangere. Six Exercises in Image Theory and Iconophilia*,” *Image and Narrative* (2007), the notion of the gaze in the *Noli me tangere* is viewed from the perspective of image theory.

Fig. 7.2. Ivory with the three Myrrhophores, c. 400. Bayerischen Nationalmuseum, Munich.

Matt. 28:1–8 and Luke 24:1–12) (fig. 7.2).²⁰ In other early images of the Resurrection Christ was depicted appearing to the *Chairete* or the Holy Women from Matthew 28:9–10 (fig. 7.3).²¹

The first unanimously accepted *Noli me tangere* appeared in the Codex Egberti, an Ottonian manuscript that was illustrated in Reichenau in the

²⁰ See *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk. Meisterwerke im Bayerischen Nationalmuseum, München, 1855–1955* (Munich: Verlag F. Bruckmann, 1955), cat. no. 3; Christophe Stiegemann and Matthias Wemhoff, ed., 799. *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit. Karl der Grosse und Papst Leo III in Paderborn* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1999), vol. 2, cat. no. X.2.

²¹ As on the Apostle Sarcophagus from the same period. The sarcophagus is lost, but still known through a 17th-century engraving in A. Bosio, *Roma Sotterranea* (1651) and Paolo Aringhi, *Roma subterranea novissima* (Coloniae, 1659 (facsimile)); see also Rafanelli, “The Ambiguity,” 372, cat. no. 3, fig. 4.

Fig. 7.3. So-called Apostle Sarcophagus with Chairete, c. 400. Known from the 17th-century engraving in A. Bosio, *Roma Sotterranea*, 1651 and Paolo Aringhi, *Roma subterranea novissima*, 1659 (facsimile).

tenth century (fig. 7.4).²² The miniature depicts the corresponding text of John's Gospel (20:11–18) on the verso of the illuminated folio 90. Situated in a manuscript there is a direct correspondence between the corresponding Gospel passage and the image. Moreover, the inscription placed above the female figure reads 'MARIA', explicitly referring Christ's mention of her name in John's Gospel. In the Egberti minianture, a slender tree divides the composition. On the left is a simple tomb flanked by two angels, each of which holds a staff. The shroud lies in the empty hollow of the tomb. Mary Magdalene kneels at the foot of the tree as she stretches out both arms towards Christ's feet. Holding a book in his left hand, Christ bends toward Mary Magdalene while pointing at her.²³ Christ is splendidly clothed, wearing a white tunic trimmed in gold.

²² Trier, Stadtbibliothek, codex 24, fol. 91; Hubert Schiel, *Codex Egberti der Stadtbibliothek Trier* (Basel: Alkuin-Verlag, 1960); Franz J. Ronig, "Erläuterungen zu den Miniaturen des Egbert Codex," in *Der Egbert Codex. Das Leben Jesu. Ein Höhepunkt der Buchmalerei vor 1000 Jahren*, ed. Sif Dagmar Dornheim (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2005), 78.

²³ The composition was copied in the Pericopes (*Perikopenbuch*) of Henry II, Echternach, 1040—Bremen, Staatsbibliothek, ms. 621; Trotzig, "Christus resurgens," fig. 10.

Fig. 7.4. *Noli me tangere*, Codex Egberti, Reichenau, c. 977–993. Stadtbibliothek, Trier, codex 24, fol. 91.

The artist of the Egberti *Noli me tangere* relied on earlier images in his representation of the scene. Evident in a comparison of earlier scenes of the Resurrection, particularly the version featuring the holy women, Mary Magdalene's kneeling posture and her outstretched hands were inherited from the early Christian *Chairete* model. Influenced by this *Chairete* prototype, the *Noli me tangere* adopts a visual formulation that was originally inspired by a different passage from the Bible, namely Matthew 28:9–10. The Gospel of John, however, makes no mention of Mary Magdalene kneeling or throwing herself at Christ's feet. Moreover, John's Gospel does not contain any explicit indication that the two figures stood facing

each other. Quite the opposite, it describes a complex physical maneuver in which the Magdalene turns her body, not once, but twice.²⁴ The early Christian Resurrection iconography had a great influence on the development of the *Noli me tangere* iconography. The Codex Egberti constitutes the moment when the *Noli me tangere* emerges as a distinct theme from an older iconographic and compositional pattern.

One convention established in the Egberti miniature is the contrast between the prostrate woman and the dominant, tall figure of Christ. This new feature reflected not only earlier artistic representations but also new theological beliefs concerning Mary Magdalene that developed in the sixth and ninth centuries, respectively. In the Merovingian period, a decisive phenomenon occurred: the conflation of Mary Magdalene with other biblical figures. In his sermon of September 21, 591 in the church of San Clemente in Rome, Gregory the Great (560–604) identified for the first time, the Mary of the Gospel of St John as the sinner of Luke 7: 36–50 and the woman from whom Christ cast out seven demons in Mark 16:9.²⁵ This fusion by Gregory the Great gave Mary Magdalene more roles in literature: a repentant sinner, Martha's sister, and witness to the Resurrection. There is speculation as to the reasons for this identification, which was presumably premeditated.²⁶ In addition to linking various episodes to a single character the tropological effect of this newly composed woman probably played a role in Gregory's decision to conflate the different Marys of the Bible. As a result of Gregory's conflation Mary Magdalene possessed the qualities both of a sinner and of a convert, and also was a witness of the raising from the dead (both Lazarus and Christ). In other words, Christianity presented an image of woman that contained sin, penance, and hope in a single formula of salvation. It is precisely this richness and complexity that earned Mary Magdalene her medieval devotion.²⁷

²⁴ On that dynamics and its repercussions for the *Noli me tangere* iconography from the 15th century onwards see M. Prado, "The Subject of Savoldo's *Magdalene*," *The Art Bulletin* 71/1 (1989): 67–91; Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien* (Munich: Fink, 2001), 104.

²⁵ Gregorius Magnus, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, hom. 33; Gregor der Grosse, *Homiliae in evangelia. Evangelienhomilien*, trans. M. von Friedraeder, vol. 28 of *Fontes Christiani* (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 616–39.

²⁶ Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen. Preaching and Popular Devotion in Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 32–35.

²⁷ For literature studies on the Mary Magdalene *topoi* in medieval traditions, see Bram Rossano, "Die deutschen und niederländischen Bearbeitungen der Pseudo-Origines-Magdalenenklage," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 126/2 (2004): 233–260; Bram Rossano, "gebristed ir doch des kroenlîns. Die Sündhaftigkeit und Virginität der Maria Magdalena in der mittelalterlichen Literatur, bes. bei Berthold

Starting from the early Middle Ages, the Mary Magdalene of the *Noli me tangere* is more than the anonymous Mary in the Gospel of John; she also became the repentant sinner in Luke. The conflation of Mary Magdalene deeply affected the perceptions of the viewer. The prostrate woman of the *Noli me tangere* was also the woman overcome by grief and remorse.

MARY MAGDALENE, NOLI ME TANGERE AND THE CYCLICAL ICONOGRAPHY IN ITALY

Playing a key role in Italian murals and cycles, the symbolic meaning and devotional character of the *Noli me tangere* underwent transformations. Illustrating these shifts in meaning, Puccio di Simone's fresco from 1340 in the Santa Trinità in Florence is considered the oldest autonomous *Noli me tangere* on a large scale (fig. 7.5).²⁸ Painted in a vault of the Strozzi family's chapel, which was dedicated to Saint Lucia, the Magdalene is presented kneeling before Christ. Here, the Magdalene appears in a red gown and her long, golden blond hair falls loosely. Christ, dressed in a white tunic, moves dramatically away from her. Although postured as retreating, his thumb almost touches Mary Magdalene's index finger. Indicative of his

von Regensburg," *Mediaevistik* 18 (2005): 209–34. The salvation formula mentioned here was at its height in the 13th century, following the institution of the annual confession (1215, Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council) and the mendicant orders who preached this praxis. Basic literature: Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 199–246; Katherine Ludwig Jansen, "Mary Magdalene and the Mendicants. The Preaching of Penance in the Late Middle Ages," *The Journal of Medieval History* 21/1 (1995): 1–25; T. Renna, "Mary Magdalen in the Thirteenth Century," *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters* 30/1 (1998): 59–68. On the basis of the Gregorian contraction and the salvation formula mentioned above, Mary Magdalene became the subject of a lacrymology. She cries out of love and she cries out of remorse. Weeping is a 'salvation condition' that leads to purification. Women were thought to have easier access to this condition, on account of their 'humid nature.' This hides an ambivalence: the Mary Magdalene schema of the lacrymology puts the woman in the moisture of tears as a laudable quality, but at the same time, she is isolated, and sometimes even limited to play a pertinent part in soteriology. On this issue see Barbara Newmann, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ. Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 172–78; Piro-ska Nagy, *Le don des larmes aux moyen âge* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2000), 388–412; Diana Apostolos-Cappadona, "Pray with tears and your request will find hearing. On the Iconography of the Magdalene's tears," in *Holy Tears. Weeping and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Kimberley Patton and John Stratton Hawley (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005), 201–28.

²⁸ Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 159–164, cat. no. 26; Eve Borsook, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany from Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 41. There is a strong affinity with the Giottesque *Noli me tangere* in the Cappella scrovegini in Padua, Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 146.

Fig. 7.5. Puccio di Simone, *Noli me tangere*, 1340. Santa Trinità, Florence.

disguise as a gardener Christ is carrying a rake in his other hand. To the left, an open tomb is visible. The backdrop for the scene is a dark forest, which prevents the viewer from seeing into distant space.

The innovative iconography, which includes the stark setting and plain garb of Mary Magdalene reveals the influence of the mendicant orders. Her loose hair refers, with deliberate ambiguity, both to her sinful past and to her later life as a hermit.²⁹ She is characterized as the *beata peccatrix*. Christ is not wearing a shroud, but a tunic, as in the Ottonian examples. The rake is feature new to images of this time period and makes reference to the verse in which Mary Magdalene takes him for the gardener. On the

²⁹ Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 162.

other hand, this attribute of Christ's contributes to the paradise topos. The rural atmosphere evokes Christ as the *Adam novus*, and consequently Mary Magdalene as the *Eva nova*.

The almost touching fingers radiate an extraordinary force. On the one hand, this moment makes clear both the inevitability of the departure and the inviolability of the resurrected body. On the other hand, as the visual centre, it shines with an almost life-giving force.³⁰ Demonstrated in this representation, the hands remain important ingredients in the iconography of the scene and reflect the scene's textual basis. The *Noli me tangere* contains the promise of reunion and of reincarnation. As the *persona* of the one who is left behind, Mary Magdalene is also the bringer of the good news of salvation, hope and enlightenment. In the context of a funerary chapel for the Strozzi family, the iconography of the scene and its meaning was appropriate. Puccio di Simone's fresco was formative for another important fresco: the *Noli me tangere* (c. 1445) by Fra Angelico (1395–1455) in Cell 1 of the San Marco monastery (fig. 7.6).³¹ Once again, we see Mary Magdalene donning a red dress with unbound hair and kneeling before Christ. Although Christ's face still looks in her direction, his body and feet have already turned away in departure. Although similar to Puccio's interpretation of the scene, Fra Angelico has subdued the interaction between Mary Magdalene and Christ and elaborated on the scene's background setting. The lawn is dotted with flowers and there is a hedge between the foreground and the forest beyond. Supporting the references to Adam and Eve in Puccio's fresco, the lushness of the garden and the hedge suggest the enclosed garden and the Garden of Eden.

An informed reading of Fra Angelico's *Noli me tangere* is also dependent on Dominican spirituality.³² The cell containing the *Noli me tangere* is located exactly at the intersection of the eastern and the northern wing of the monastery. This is the location separating the corridor for the clergy and the guest accommodations for laymen. The cell with the *Noli*

³⁰ The 14th-century Tuscan *Vita Maria Magdaleneae* stresses the exceptionally chosen love between Christ and Mary Magdalene; Valentina Hawtrey, *Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 76.

³¹ Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, *passim*.

³² Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 168–78; Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 14–22, 163. In the *Noli me tangere* scene, in contrast to the other cells in the clergy hall (cells 2 to 11), no Dominican is represented. William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 199–200, therefore surmises that this cell belonged to the master of the laymen, he who was charged with training the laymen and dividing tasks between the enclosed monks and those who were active in the broader world.

Fig. 7.6. Fra Angelico, *Noli me tangere*, c. 1445, fresco. San Marco, Florence.

me tangere lies at the threshold between the two missions of the Dominicans: study in *clausura*, and teaching in public.³³ This boundary position is embodied by Mary Magdalene herself, who was simultaneously the apostle of the Resurrection and the repentant sinner. Demonstrated in Puccio

³³ Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 14–22, sees a connection between the *Noli me tangere* in cell 1 and the Annunciation in cell 31. Not only are the two frescoes connected by their physical proximity, the cyclical development from the beginning to the completion of the incarnation is expressed in an analogous color palette and flora.

di Simone's fresco the context of the *Noli me tangere* partially determined the manner in which the Magdalene was characterized. With respect to Fra Angelico's fresco, the *Noli me tangere* was a spiritual example that distinguished the Dominicans from other orders. The Dominican process of identification with a woman served to enhance the social and spiritual status and influence of Mary Magdalene in Italy, particularly her identification as a societal outcast.³⁴ Mary Magdalene's roles of converted sinner and hermit dominated her *vita* and remained more popular than the *Noli me tangere* motif throughout the Italian *Trecento* and *Quattrocento*.

NOLI ME TANGERE IN THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Through an examination of Puccio di Simone's and Fra Angelico's representation of the *Noli me tangere*, it is evident that their context shaped the iconography of the scene. Especially in Italy, Mary Magdalene became an exemplar for the mendicants, shifting the emphasis from her life as an ascetic to that of a repentant sinner. What shifts took place in the *Noli me tangere* iconography outside of Italy is also significant.

North of the Alps, Mary Magdalene was not unequivocally praised as the penitent sinner of Luke or the hermit of Sainte-Baume in literary sources. From the second half of the thirteenth century, the *Noli me tangere* appeared in the context of texts made for pious women. The *Conversio beatae Mariae Magdalene*, which was distributed in Middle Dutch and in Low German from the thirteenth century onwards, reflects the perception of Mary Magdalene at that time.³⁵ In this discourse, Mary Magdalene is presented as a beautiful, secular woman, who converted to Christianity after learning of Jesus from her sister Martha. Her conversion is dramatic. She confesses that she is a prostitute and also calls herself a *leprosa*. The next day, she sees Christ in the flesh, and meets his gaze (117), a gaze that wounds her (Song 4:9). Later, she visits Christ at the house of Simon the Pharisee, where she washes his feet and speaks to him.

The strong emphasis on love in this text was influenced by courtly mysticism. The thirteenth-century Brabant mystic Hadewych described how Mary Magdalene was her favorite role model, since she had such

³⁴ Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 178.

³⁵ H. Hansel, *Die Maria-Magdalena-Legende. Eine Quellen-Untersuchung*, 16/1 (Greifswald: Universität Greifswald, 1937), note 28.

a strong love for Christ.³⁶ It was understandable that Mary Magdalene became a role model for the beguines. The beguines, who were active in the Low Countries and the Rhineland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were lay religious groups of women who lived in communities without taking formal vows. The presence of these communities influenced the spiritual devotion of love in the North. For those rather 'free' and mostly intellectual women, Mary Magdalene personified the shunning of the worldly life for the spiritual love of God.³⁷ This facet of the Magdalene greatly contributed to her expanded roles in this time period. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, for example, Caesarius of Heisterbach discussed the Magdalene's appeal to all types of women.³⁸ She was the patroness of widows, the third *matrone*, along with the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne. She was even a virgin, because she had regained that purity by her washing tears.³⁹ And she was Christ's bride.⁴⁰ In short, this list shows that in the North Mary Magdalene was type-casted with nearly every female role.

Jean de Vitry's *vita* of Mary of Oignies (1215), a beguine from the Liège region, is not only illustrative of the interaction between the nun and the figure of Mary Magdalene, but also of the male mediator of that interaction.⁴¹ Notable here is that the relationship between Mary of

³⁶ Ende groet exempel mach nemen af,/ Hoe enich si hare der minnen gaf./ Dat was Maria Magdalene; F. Willaert, 'Hadewijch en Maria Magdalena' in *Miscellanea Neerlandica. II. Opstellen voor Dr. Jan Deschamps ter gelegenheid van zijn zevenstigste verjaardag*, ed. E. Cockx-Indestege (Leuven: 1987), 57–69.

³⁷ Elizabeth Avilda Petroff, "A New Feminine Spirituality: The Beguines and Their Writings in Medieval Europe," in *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, ed. Elizabeth Avilda Petroff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 51–65. For a rich study of the cultural-historical context, see also Paul Vandenbroeck, *Hooglied. De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw* (Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994) and the literature cited there.

³⁸ Anneke Mulder-Bakker, "Was Mary Magdalene a Magdalen? On Abélard's sermon no 8 on Easter Sunday in which Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a female apostle," in *Media Latinitas. A Collection of Essays to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of L. J. Engels*, ed. R.I.A. Nip, vol. 28 of *Instrumenta patristica* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 269–74, esp. 273.

³⁹ The mystic Margery Kempe (second half of the 14th century) was a mother of fourteen children, but in a vision, Christ told her that she was nevertheless a virgin: a virgin in her soul; B.A. Windeatt, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, (London: Penguin Books: 2004) 86, 88.

⁴⁰ According to Honorius Augustodunensis (first half of the 12th century), Mary Magdalene was married: 'Haec Maria in Magdalum castellum marito traditur, sed ab eo in Hierosolimam fugiens, generis innemor, legis Dei oblita, vulgaris meretrix efficitur'; cited in Mulder-Bakker, "Was Mary Magdalene," 270.

⁴¹ D. Papebroeck, "Vita Mariae Oigniacensis," *AA SS* 5 (1867): 542–572. In 1231, the Dominican Thomas of Chantimpré added a supplementum (Papebroeck, "Vita Mariae," 572–81).

Ognies and her preacher is described as 'Magdalenian.' She had the habit of nestling at his feet.⁴² Upon the occasion when a man took her hand, not without physical desire, a voice resounded that said, *Noli me tangere*. God wanted to guard her chastity.⁴³

In the *Schwester Katrei* (1314–24) from the circles of Master Eckhart, a beguine composed a sermon on Mary Magdalene.⁴⁴ In the text, she described the process of a noble woman to a noble love. In the *Noli me tangere*, says the beguine, Mary Magdalene is set free and becomes a proclaimer. However, the active mission is not her goal, but the *unio*, which the woman achieves in the communion. The process is a transition from externals of the *luxuria* to the interiority of the *fin amant*, the strong lover.⁴⁵

Demonstrated in the aforementioned religious tracts, a relationship between female spirituality and the *Noli me tangere* existed in the North, differentiating it from the Italian tradition. This interaction between female spirituality and the northern *Noli me tangere* was influenced by the association of Mary Magdalene with the bride in the Song of Songs.⁴⁶ This association was already established by Hippolytus of Rome in the passage of Song 3:1–4 in which the bride seeks her lover. When the watchmen shows her the way, she wants to take him to her mother's room for an intimate encounter. Whereas the seeking and finding in John 20 culminates in the emotion of letting go, 'the Song of Songs identifies the relationship between woman and man as seeking and finding/not finding, as a (loving) grasp in order to hold.'⁴⁷ The passage was adopted for the liturgy of the saint's day on July 22nd.

⁴² M. Lauwers, "'Noli me tangere.' Marie Madeleine, Marie d'Oignies et les pénitentes du XIII^e siècle," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 104/1 (1992): 209–68, esp. 249; Papebroeck, "Vita Mariae," 562.

⁴³ Lauwers "'Noli me tangere,'" 242–43; Papebroeck, "Vita Mariae," 564C.

⁴⁴ Franz-Josef Schweitzer, *Der Freiheitsbegriff der deutschen Mystik. Seine Beziehung zur Ketzerei der "Brüder und Schwestern vom Freien Geist" mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den pseudo-eckartischen Traktat "Schwester Katrei"* (Frankfurt, 1981), 322–70; Elvira Borgstädt, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 349–87; Newmann 1995, op. cit. (n. 27), 172–78. Master Eckhart enjoyed being influenced by women. Because of the heterodox nature of his writings, he does not censor the descriptions of female spiritual experiences. He does not have the reflex to conform.

⁴⁵ Newmann, *From Virile Woman*, 175.

⁴⁶ The concept of 'interspace' ('*tussenruimte*') is taken from Sabine Van Den Eynde, "Hou mij niet vast. Een pleidooi voor een intertekstuele interpretatie van Maria Magdalena," in *Noli me tangere. Maria Magdalena in veehvoud*, ed. Barbara Baert et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 1–14.

⁴⁷ Van Den Eynde, "Hou mij niet vast," 11.

A Canticle of Mary Magdalene, written in thirteenth-century Provence, expresses her great love of Christ in a monologue. "‘Mary!,’ he said. And I recognized the Master and rushed to him, to embrace him. But he said, ‘Do not touch me!’ And I understood that I must die, like him, if I was to be at one with love, that does not die, but, beyond death and the grave, points us the way to a happiness that is great without end and durable without end."⁴⁸ Here, the insight-generating impact of the *Noli me tangere* is radicalized to such an extent that Mary Magdalene has to pass through death, together with Christ, so that she can ‘resurrect’ in everlasting love and wisdom. These interpretations distill from the Magdalene in the *Noli me tangere* a figure that participates in a higher level of knowledge, a level that is reached through mystical aspirations.

In the visual arts, this new facet of the Magdalene’s character, among others, was circulated in the *Biblia Pauperum*. In artistic representations in the *Biblia Pauperum* New Testament figures were often paired with those from the Old Testament. Significantly, the *Noli me tangere* was portrayed with both Daniel in the den of lions (Dan 6:19–24) and the encounter and embrace of the bride and bridegroom of the Song of Solomon (Song 3:4). In the printed version of c. 1460 two new motifs appear (fig. 7.7).⁴⁹ The positions of Christ and Mary Magdalene are reversed and the setting for the scene is an enclosed garden. Evident in Schongauer’s engraving and panel painting, a low wall becomes a typical motif of the northern *Noli me tangere* (c. 1481) (fig. 7.8).⁵⁰ The motif of the walled garden derived its meaning from the context of spiritual intimacy and became a metaphor for the bride.⁵¹

A comparison of Mary Magdalene’s role as the bride of the canticles to prayers and sermons from the Low Countries reveals that she was also

⁴⁸ Franciscus Antonius Brunklaus, *Het Hooglied van Maria Magdalena* (Maastricht: Leiter-Nypels, 1940), 96. The *Noli me tangere* is also fitted in with the Raising of Lazarus. ‘En ik, vol dankbaarheid, sloeg mijn armen om de Meester heen, maar met één blik uit zijn ogen weerde hij me af: “Raak me niet aan”, zei hij. Maar reeds lag Lazarus in mijn armen, schreiend van geluk’ (‘And I, filled with gratitude, embraced the master, but with one look from his eyes, he warded me off. “Do not touch me,” he said. But already Lazarus lay in my arms, weeping for joy.’) Brunklaus, *Het Hooglied*, 92.

⁴⁹ G. Klaucke, “De ‘*Noli me tangere*’ scène in de Nederlandse prent- en schilderkunst van de vijftiende tot en met de zeventiende eeuw,” *Kunstlicht* 14/3–4 (1993): 42–48.

⁵⁰ Colmar, Musée d’Unterlinden. F. Anzelewsky, “Schongauers Spanienreise,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 58/1 (1995): 1–21.

⁵¹ The walled garden also enhances the reality content of the scene. F. Collins, in *The Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972), 59, denies that the garden would suggest a dramaturgical setting. In the stage directions of the Paschal plays, the *Noli me tangere* is staged near the sepulchre.

Fig. 7. *Noli me tangere* from the *Biblia Pauperum*. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

put forth as a lover of Christ. Hendrik Herps (c. 1410–1478) in his *Spiegel der volcomenheit* (c. 1455–1460), portrayed her as a *mediatrix* who obtains purity through her tears, “I shall make my heart, with which one sees God, clean with my tears.”⁵² In a prayer in Middle Dutch (1504), currently housed in the Ghent University library, which is a paraphrase of a prayer by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Mary Magdalene is described as having risen from the “dungeon of sins” to the “beloved friend of God.”⁵³ The imperfect medieval individual can identify with Mary Magdalene as a *mediatrix*—as “the favorite lover and beloved of God” (fol. 246v).⁵⁴ She represents the promise that, however dark one’s sins, one can be forgiven by Christ.

Another prominent characteristic of the *Noli me tangere* theme in the North is the representation of Christ as the gardener, *Christus hortulamus*.

⁵² Ic sal mijn herte, daer men Gode mede siet, reyn maken mit minen tranen.

⁵³ UB 209, fol. 246r; Bram Rossano, “Met eender fonteynen der tranen. De betekenis van Maria Magdalena’s tranen in een Middelnederlands gebed en verwante teksten,” *Spiegel der letteren* 47/1 (2005): 1–19, esp. 6 and 13. Her tears meet the four-part typology of penitence: *compunctio* (compunction), *compassio* (compassion), *contritio* (contrition) and *amor* (love). See also note 27.

⁵⁴ Uutvercoorene minnerse ende gheminde gods.

Fig. 7.8. Martin Schongauer, *Noli me tangere*, c. 1481, retable. Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar.

Fig. 7.9. *Noli me tangere*, c. 1525, pall. Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp. Photo: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp.

Beyond wearing a tunic and carrying a rake or spade as in Italian representations, Christ appears in the full attire of a gardener. A pall from c. 1525 in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp exemplifies this representation of Christ (fig. 7.9).⁵⁵ Clothed as a gardener, Christ is not represented as resurrected with the stigmata, but rather as the human

⁵⁵ Barbara Baert, cat. entry in *Noli me tangere. Maria Magdalena in veebvoud*, 60–61. Hans M.J. Nieuwdorp and Frida Sorber, *Textiel. Weefsels-Borduurwerk-Kant-Wandtapijten. Catalogus 3 Museum Mayer van den Bergh* (Schoten: Govaerts, 1980), 73, nr. 159. Legends: O/SPES./A/VIA/..PSOR/LAPSA/MA/; O/PIA/PECCAT(RI)X/SPO(N)SI/CELESTRIS/REX/; IMPETRET/AD/DNM/TUA/SCAPCA/SU./; SUPPLICIO./FAV./ELCE/GAUDIA/PHIS

Christ. Moreover, the banderole of Mary Magdalene on the pall bears the inscription 'RABBOENI.' The iconography therefore seems to refer to verse 16 of John 20, when she recognizes her master. Strictly speaking, at that moment, the ban on touching has not yet been pronounced, although the play of hands in the scene suggests the opposite. According to certain authors, the contraction of these different successive moments into one scene is the result of an influence from drama.⁵⁶ The introduction of the *Christus hortolamus* took place in the passion plays, in which Christ's 'disguise' was an important theatrical element.⁵⁷ The *hortolamus* is Christ's costume in the *Noli me tangere* scene of the so-called *Visitatio sepulchri*. The *hortolamus* represents a human Christ, and within the theme of the Resurrection, emphasizes the appearance of the Christ-man to Mary Magdalene rather than his imminent reunion with God.⁵⁸

Mary Magdalene herself was subjected to a similar secularization, wearing sophisticated contemporary clothing on the pall. In contrast to Italian examples and Schongauer's work, her hair does not flow over her shoulders. The secularization of Mary Magdalene was accompanied by a growing interest in her sinful life. In mystery plays and manuscripts of her *vita*, she was depicted as a dancer (fig. 7.10).⁵⁹ Aristocratic and patrician women of the North identified with Mary Magdalene in portraits. The jar of ointment in the portrait by Quinten Metsijs (c. 1466–1530) indicates that this woman presents herself as Mary Magdalene (fig. 7.11).⁶⁰ Mary Magdalene is the only major exemplary saint to whom tradition gave a

⁵⁶ Collins, *Production of Medieval Church Music*, 63.

⁵⁷ This standpoint is defended by Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 161. It concerns an elaboration of the liturgical drama *visitatio sepulchri*; Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933); M. Chauvin, "The Role of Mary Magdalene in Medieval Drama" (PhD diss., Washington, 1951), 142; Helen Meredith Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1950), 69. There is reference to dialogues in the medieval plays in which Christ tests Mary Magdalene's faith by appearing to her 'in disguise.'

⁵⁸ Young, *The Drama*. The text is a dialogue (p. 202) *Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae* ('Jesus, the Nazarene, the crucified, o angels'). *Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat; ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchre* ('He is not here, He is risen, as He predicted; go and announce that He has risen from the grave'). The content is derived from Matthew 28:5–10, Mark 16:5–7 and Luke 24:4–6. The dialogue form is inspired by choir songs from contemporary liturgy. The version in its original form, occurs in a manuscript in Sankt Gallen and dates to the middle of the 10th century. With thanks to Isabelle Vanden Hove.

⁵⁹ C. van den Wildenberg-de Kroon, "Das Weltleben und die Bekehrung der Maria Magdalena im Deutschen religiösen Drama und in der Bildende Kunst des Mittelalters" (PhD diss., Amsterdam, 1979).

⁶⁰ Antwerpen, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten.

Fig. 7.11. Quinten Metsijs, *Lady as Mary Magdalene*, c. 1500. Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

Fig. 7.12. *Noli me tangere* from the Medallion of the Shrine of Our Lady, 1205. Tournai.

takes precedence as the viewer's empathy with Mary Magdalene's experience on seeing her *Rabboni*, the Risen Christ.

Along with the spirituality of religious women and the Song of Songs, another factor that affected the appearance of the northern *Noli me tangere* was the French relic cult. In the context of the French relic cult a unique *Noli me tangere* iconography emerged in the North. In the painting of the *Seven Joys of the Virgin* by Hans (c. 1480) the *Noli me tangere* takes place behind a rock (fig. 7.13).⁶² Christ, holding a crosier and wearing a

⁶² Donated by Pieter Bultync and Katharina van Riebecke to the church of Our Lady of Bruges, currently in Munich, Alte Pinakothek; N. Schneider, "Zur Ikonographie von

Fig. 7.13. *Noli me tangere*, detail from Hans Memling, *Seven Joys of the Virgin*, 1480, retable. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

red robe that exposes the wound in his side, stands to the left of Mary Magdalene, who is bending forward with her jar of ointment in her hand. Her pose is one of supplication—almost confession—and what's more, she does not look Christ in the eye, as if she is submitting to him in shame. Even more remarkable than the figures' interaction is Christ's placement of his thumb on her forehead as if he is anointing or blessing her. While Memling is the first known artist specifically to depict Christ touching the Magdalene, others followed: a painting by Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostzanen from 1507,⁶³ Albrecht Dürer's woodcut from 1510–11, and an engraving by Lucas van Leyden from 1519.⁶⁴

Among the relics of Mary Magdalene rediscovered by Charles II of Anjou in Saint-Maximin in 1279 was her skull to which a small piece of forehead skin still adhered (fig. 7.14).⁶⁵ The occasion of this *inventio* gave rise to the tradition that this piece of skin had been touched by Christ. Paradoxically enough, this relic became the so-called *Noli me tangere* relic that attracted many pilgrims.⁶⁶ The skull was placed in a golden shrine in 1280.⁶⁷

Hans Memling's interpretation of the *Noli me tangere* makes a direct reference to the Provençal tradition of the relic. The fifteenth century Provençal play *Rouergue résurrection* contains a specific stage direction for the actor playing Christ to explicitly touch the forehead of Mary

Memlings 'Die Sieben Freuden Mariens', " *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 3/24 (1973): 21–32.

⁶³ Kassel, Gemäldegalerie; Klaucke, "De 'noli me tangere' scène," 42–48.

⁶⁴ See C. Harbison, "Lucas van Leyden, the Magdalene and the Problem of Secularization in Early Christian Century Northern Art," *Oud Holland* 98 (1984): 117–29.

⁶⁵ M.D. Orth, "The Magdalene Shrine of La Sainte-Baume in 1516. A Series of Miniatures by Godefroy le Batabe (B.N. Ms. Fr. 24.955)," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 98 (1981): 209; Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 108–9.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, "Admonition, in which it is shown how advantageous it would be for Christendom that the bodies and relics of Saints were reduced to a kind of inventory," in *Tracts Relating to the Reformation* (Edinburgh: 1844), vol. 1, 294, says that this relic was venerated as a kind of God who descended from heaven, but that closer inspection would clearly show that the skin was a fraud. Calvin also mentions the popular belief that the skin—according to the author, a very small piece—showed the imprint of Christ's fingers, with which he pushed Mary Magdalene away when he got angry at her attempt to touch him (p. 330).

⁶⁷ In 1491, the church of Sainte Madeleine in Marseille claimed an original piece of this skin. In 1789, the skin was removed from the skull and put in a separate shrine; Michel Moncault, *La basilique Sainte-Marie-Madeleine et le convent royal* (Aix-en-Provence: EDISUD, 1985), 38.

Fig. 7.14. Head reliquary of Mary Magdalene, crypt. Saint-Maximin, La-Sainte-Baume.

Magdalene.⁶⁸ This touch implies a different relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene than the one we have been accustomed to so far in the *Noli me tangere* iconography. Not only does it break the tactile taboo, the manner of touching itself has important affinities with the rites of confession and baptism. By touching her, Christ appears to Mary Magdalene in a priestly sense as if offering her the benediction. This type of *Noli me tangere* stages the penitent profile of the sinful Mary Magdalene. It also puts her attribute of the jar of ointment in a different light. In the first place, the jar refers to her role of myrrhophore, but secondly, it also refers

⁶⁸ Chauvin, "The Role of Mary Magdalene," 143.

to her anointing of Christ's feet. The jar of ointment, then, is another sign of repentance.⁶⁹

In the Netherlands and Germany in the fifteenth century the iconography of the *Noli me tangere* images was versatile. Of special significance is the unique treatment of the scene by Hans Memling in which Christ actually touches the Magdalene's forehead. In Italy, it is not until the Cinquecento that we find the influence of the *hortulamus*, the fashionable Mary Magdalene and the touching by a Christ-priest.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION: BODIES AND EMBODIMENTS

In this examination of the *Noli me tangere*, a comparison of scripture and exegesis with visual imagery reveals the key points that placed the body in its anthropology of the incarnation, the cycle of salvation, and the divine aura. But the *Noli me tangere* does more: it transfixes the three key points through their core with gender tension. The demand to give up the desire to touch definitively on the grounds of departure and divine union—*Noli me tangere*—is not only gender-charged emotionally, but is also a *momentum* in the history of salvation. Appealing to the emotions, it bears upon the parting, the farewell between a man and a woman. As a *momentum* in the history of salvation, the *Noli me tangere* strikes up the final chord of Christ's visibility on earth, and announces his return to invisibility. Of all people, a woman is chosen to witness and proclaim this transformation. This transformation is an inner process, and is therefore difficult to represent in art. However, by placing the emotional emphasis on the gaze and on the hands, these bodily features became symbolic bearers for representing this deeper meaning of the *Noli me tangere*.

In short, in the visualization of the *Noli me tangere*, the physical/aphysical interaction between Mary Magdalene and Christ must incorporate the emotion and the *momentum*. Thus, the *Noli me tangere*, precisely in its denial of tactility, became an iconography that presents corporeality at its apex, the threshold between the resurrection of the body and its vanishing point. The inch of space between a thumb and a forefinger is a

⁶⁹ Moreover, there is a medieval tradition that identified the Magdalene's jar with the alabaster jar containing Christ's foreskin. Mary Magdalene's alabaster jar of ointment belonged to Saint-Victoire in Marseille. Her aromatic oils were kept in Saint-Sevère in Les Landes; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 218; Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene*, 33.

⁷⁰ On this issue, see Rafanelli, "The Ambiguity," 199–200, 208–10.

pars pro toto for the greatest rift in the history of salvation: the transition from Christ's physical visibility to his invisibility. Jean-Luc Nancy sums up the corporeality of the *Noli me tangere* as 'opening, separation, partition and elevation of the body.'⁷¹

Moving to the diachronic overview of visual images, this discussion has demonstrated that the bodies in the *Noli me tangere* are not uniform. *Noli me tangere* thematizes the body in its perception. Christ appears in three manifestations. The *Noli me tangere* teaches that corporeality in Christian anthropology is also about a seeing that *activates*. The Dominicans of San Marco had a good grasp of this activation of sight and the threshold beyond the body. Their *Noli me tangere* looks both ways: to the active life of preaching and to the empty contours of the body in contemplative study. The male mendicant orders appropriated this double position as their mission, and thereby socially eroded this position, which was originally exclusively female, into a matter for men.

But the *Noli me tangere* also teaches that corporeality, in Christian anthropology, is about seeing beyond the body. There where the body departs—becomes sacrosanct—the void is filled with the spiritual image, the *beata visio*. The so-called threshold of the *Noli me tangere* is therefore also expressed in scopophilia: the love of looking that carries us to the other shore of the body itself.

North of the Alps, Mary Magdalene—and the *Noli me tangere* in particular—never really became encapsulated in the ideology of the mendicant orders. The *Noli me tangere* certainly affected the female mystic movement of the North. There was unmistakably an awareness of the chosen role of Mary Magdalene as a witness in the *Noli me tangere*. This awareness was nurtured by a spiritual climate that presented Mary Magdalene as the bride of the Song of Songs. In this process, the physical separation between Mary Magdalene and Christ is mainly drawn from the angle of mystic love *beyond* the physical. The *Noli me tangere* is an exemplum for the *unio* with God.

During the fifteenth century, new iconographic details are added in the North, such as the *Christus hortulamus* and Christ touching Mary Magdalene. The interest in the gardener may have been suggested by drama or by the worldly taste of the *ars nova*. In any event, it draws our attention to the 'guise' of Christ. The *hortulamus*—*Noli me tangere* is a

⁷¹ 'Ouverture, séparation, partance' and 'levée du corps'; Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, 76.

prefiguration of the departing and invisible Christ and involves the spectator in the mystery of the veiled manifestation.

Finally, the touching Christ, for the first time, bridges the physical gap and corresponds to the apocryphal traditions surrounding the skin relic of Mary Magdalene. Here, they have reached a point where the human spirit has sent its empathy with Mary Magdalene soaring so high that it has filled the unendurable void itself with the desire for the sanctifying touch. It is a touch in the *Noli me tangere* that brings tactility back to its core: purification and rebirth.

Translated from Dutch by Audrey van Tuyckom