

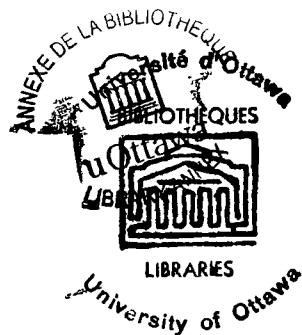
CRAFTSMANSHIP OF THE DIGBY

MARY MAGDALENE PLAY

by

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Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Ottawa through the
Department of English in partial fulfil-
ment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts.



Ottawa, Canada, 1969

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to thank the
director of this thesis, Dr. A. P. Campbell,
for his generosity, patience and guidance
during its preparation.

CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

John Francis Sheridan received his
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Denigrated by nineteenth century criticism, the medieval drama is gradually coming into proper critical light.¹ Though critics like Salter² and Prosser³ have successfully argued for the cycles as serious drama, one medieval play, the Digby Mary Magdalene, still needs to be seriously considered: so far it has generally been looked on as a poor mixture of mystery, miracle, and morality play.⁴ From the point of view of staging, plot, and especially diction, it has generally been regarded as

¹See O. B. Hardison, Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965), pp. vii-viii, 33: "... single defining difference between the attitude of the nineteenth century literary scholar and the scholar writing after World War II, ... the greater willingness of the contemporary to recognize the close bond between the huge area of experience conventionally labelled 'religion' and that labelled 'literature'. ... standard historians of medieval drama have followed the procedures used by early evolutionary anthropologists in connection with the study of myth. ... History has become teleological, interpreted both intentionally and unconsciously in terms of what texts anticipate rather than what they are."

²F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto, 1955), pp. 83-4.

³Eleanor Prosser, Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays (Stanford, 1961), p. 15.

⁴A. W. Pollard, ed., English Miracle Plays Moralities and Interludes (Oxford, 1909), p. 193.

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a wild, unmanageable work.⁵ It is our view, on the contrary, that this play is the creation of a craftsman of considerable talent. And the purpose of this study is to examine the text of the Digby Mary Magdalene play in order to show that the critics have generally overlooked or misunderstood its conventions, meaning, and purpose. This study will test its craftsmanship on three essential points: staging, unity of plot, and dramatic diction.

The Digby Mary Magdalene is contained in the Digby MS. 133 of the Bodleian Library. Included in the Manuscript are three other plays, Killing of the Children, The Conversion of St Paul, and a portion of Wisdom. Except for their common Midland origin, the plays are dissimilar and are not by the same author.⁶ Coming towards the end of the medieval period these plays, the Digby Mary Magdalene in particular, appear to be what is called

⁵Katharine Lee Bates, The English Religious Drama (New York, 1893), p. 160. See also Arnold Williams, The Drama of Medieval England (Lansing, 1961), p. 166.

⁶See The Digby Plays, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London, 1967), vii-xiii. These titles, as well as Mary Magdalene, were given to these plays editorially by Furnivall, who included an Easter play, "the 'Burial and Resurrection of Christ,' which evidently once belonged to the Digby MS. 133,..." On the other hand, Donald C. Baker and John L. Murphy, The Late Medieval Plays of MS. Digby 133: Scribes, Dates, and Early History RORD 10:153-66, call the plays, Killing of the Children, Conversion of Saul, Mary Magdalene, and Wisdom, and argue against the retention of the Easter play in the Digby MS. 133, since, they claim, they have evidence to prove it was never part of the Manuscript.

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"transitional" or impure in form, a random mixture of cycle, morality, and mystery play. Furnivall, who edited the plays in 1882,⁷ dates the play between 1480 and 1490. Baker and Murphy, who in their recent study of the Manuscript favour c. 1510-20 for Saul, Magdalene and the Children, and c. 1490-1500 for Wisdom, also doubt that the Mary Magdalene play was ever part of the Digby library.⁸ This play was performed at Norfolk in 1503 or 1504, and at Oxford in 1506.⁹ Thomas Warton states that it was played on a stage in an open field at Bassingbourne, Cambridgeshire, in 1511.¹⁰

The earlier criticism of the Digby Mary Magdalene play belongs to the general criticism of medieval drama. Thomas Warton, who lumped religious plays under the term MYSTERIES (sic) called them "rude and ridiculous", claimed that indulgences had to be offered as an inducement to attend some of them, that a pope decreed the sentencing to hell of those who disturbed the performances, and that these plays helped to eradicate the tournaments and other

⁷Furnivall, op. cit., p. iii.

⁸Baker and Murphy, op. cit., pp. 156, 165.

⁹Cf. Grace Isabel Kiner, A Theory for the Staging of Mary Magdalene (unpublished Master's dissertation, Chicago, 1927), p. 1.

¹⁰Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry (London, 1781), III, p. 326.

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muscular sports:

... the pope ... denouncing the sentence of damnation on all those incorrigible sinners, who presumed to disturb or interrupt the due celebration of these pious sports. It is certain that they had their uses, not only in teaching the great truths of Scripture to men who could not read the Bible, but in abolishing the barbarous attachment to military games, and the bloody contentions of the tournament, which had so long prevailed as the sole species of popular amusement. Rude and ridiculous as they were, they softened the manners of the people, by diverting the public attention to spectacles in which the mind was concerned, and by creating a regard for other arts than those of bodily strength and savage valour.¹¹

Over a century later John Payne Collier, writing about the cycles and miracle plays, suggested that what seemed absurd in them was in their day considered pious and inspiring and that their examination had been less than thorough:

In judging of the form, incidents, and language of these productions, we must of course carry our minds back to the period when they were written or represented: we shall then find, that much that now seems absurd, ludicrous, or even profane, was then pious, awful, and impressive... We might easily carry farther an examination of the oldest forms of our national drama as preserved in manuscript, hitherto very imperfectly and superficially treated,...¹²

Miss Katharine Bates, in 1893, summed up the two critical views then extant on the miracle plays, the primeval chaos from which Shakespeare sprang by divine fiat, or the

¹¹Ibid., p. 44.

¹²The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare (London, 1879), pp. 64 and 157.

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consummation of human, fiendish, and divine forces clashing and shaping them together:

... two ways of regarding our old Miracle Plays. ... confusedly, contemptuously, as the primal dramatic chaos out of which the Elizabethan stage rose, not by process of evolution, but by divine fiat,... Others see in this five-centuried growth not merely the dramatic elements, but these displayed on a grand scale and already shapen into a huge, rough-hewn, majestic Gothic drama. ... not merely collision, but tremendous clash of conflict; not merely scheme, but inevitable development of event from event, and those events colossal; not merely life-like characterizations, but realised humanity, deviltry, and Divinity; not merely passion, but all the passion that surged through the great, child-like, medieval heart.¹³

Mary Magdalene is specifically criticized by Miss Bates because it belonged to the period when the religious stage was "decaying" and that it was illogical, the mixed offspring of mystery, miracle and morality, structurally confused, extraordinarily long, loose in plot, and important only as a forerunner of the secular drama:

This long, illogical drama, in part Scriptural, in part legendary, and in part allegorical, is of interest as embracing the elements alike of Mystery, Saint Play, and Morality,... greatly confused in structure and of extraordinary length.... The plot is of the loosest... These Digby Mysteries, later than the York, the Towneley, the Coventry, the Chester, are by that so much poorer, belonging to the decay of the old religious stage and pointing, by their very restlessness and caprice, to the coming change and the birth of secular drama.¹⁴

¹³Bates, op. cit., p. 168.

¹⁴Bates, op. cit., pp. 160, 151-152.

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Ten years later, Alfred Bates, found this play to be immense in size, clumsily arranged, and a mixture of genres, a harbinger of a new epoch:

... [Digby Mary Magdalene] swells out to an immense size for that age, for it did not admit of being broken up into a number of small plays.

In its tendency, as in its rather clumsy arrangement, the play of Mary Magdalene is a thorough product of the middle ages. Such a mixture of different species characterizes the termination of that period, and announces at the same time a more modern epoch.¹⁵

Alfred W. Pollard, in 1909, described the Digby Mary Magdalene play as a curiosity consisting of a mixture of genres. He claimed it had no dramatic unity:

The importance of this play consists chiefly in its union of all the essentials of every kind of religious and didactic drama. It is a miracle play, according to the current definition, as treating of the life and death of St Mary Magdalene. It is a mystery play, by virtue of the introduction of scenes from the life of Christ. It is a morality play, as exhibiting the contest between good and evil, and as introducing upon the stage such abstract personages as the King of the Flesh. ... the play, ... has the least possible dramatic unity.¹⁶

The editors of the Cambridge History of English Literature in 1917, classified Mary Magdalene as a late medieval play because of its great number of sensational artifacts, singling out the priest-boy scene and its mock service,

¹⁵The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization. ed. vol. IV. (London, 1903), p. 110.

¹⁶English Miracle Plays Moralities and Interludes (Oxford, 1909), p. 193.

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as silly and modern:

... its almost unprecedented accumulation of sensational effects betrays its late date ... a burlesque scene between a priest and his boy, who, after being threatened with a flogging, proceeds to deserve it by intoning a mock service in nonsense Latin. ... What could be sillier or more modern?¹⁷

In 1919, George R. Coffman characterized the so-called morality sections of Mary Magdalene as realism and called the tavern scene a naturalistic seduction:

... though the play contains a personification of the seven deadly sins, the technique is not that of the morality, it is not symbolistic, but realistic and direct. Thus, in the temptation scene, Mary becomes tired of staying at home and goes away to an inn--just as would happen today. A young man comes along and carries on a naturalistic seduction.¹⁸

A year later, Robert Lee Campbell, while discussing the diction of the play, found the playwright a better scenarist than speech writer:

The writer succeeded far better in organizing and blocking out his play than he did in the actual composition of the speeches. The scenes follow each other for the most part in good order, and contain the necessary action and events to carry the play along: but the language seldom, if ever, rises to any dramatic height, and is for the most part exceedingly mediocre. Had moving pictures been in vogue during the latter part of the

¹⁷"The Early Religious Drama: Miracle Plays and Moralities." The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1917), V, p. 19.

¹⁸"The Miracle Plays in England Some Records of Presentation and Notes on Preserved Plays" SP, xvi. 1919, p. 65.

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fifteenth century, the Mary Magdalene would have been one of the most successful scenarios of the day.¹⁹

Hardin Craig, thirty-five years later, noted that Mary Magdalene contained pretentious language, was extensively developed in content and staging, and was an improbable story:

The romantic parts from the Golden Legend are in pretentious language... There is among the English mystery plays no play of more extensive development, both in contents and staging, than that of St Mary Magdalene, and it is indeed a wonder to observe what amplification and redaction have done to these simple beginnings. ... The play is continuous in action, a most varied and improbable story,...²⁰

In 1961, Arnold Williams declared that the play sprawled, characterization and incident selection were weak, the story romantic, and that it was only a prototype of romantic Elizabethan drama:

This sprawling play is hardly memorable dramatic art. Characterization, the interplay of character and situation, the purposeful selection of incident to embody theme, of these it has scarcely any. Its contribution is rather to technique. The story is radically romantic--saints' lives are often called romances in the church.

Obviously, we are well embarked on the road to the romantic drama of the Elizabethan age, ... And it was in plays like the Digby Mary Magdalene that the technique of the romantic drama was worked

¹⁹"The Digby Mary Magdalene" (unpublished Master's dissertation, University of Chicago, 1920), p. 79.

²⁰English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (London, 1955), pp. 4, 6, 9, 15, 376.

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out.²¹

As late as 1965, Robert H. Bowers found the dramatic diction in the tavern scene of the Digby Mary Magdalene an artistic failure; he accused the playwright of using aureate diction when dramatic action demanded colloquial speech:

... [Mary Magdalene is] an artistic failure in the representation of the striking "seduction-in-a-tavern" scene ... which employs aureate diction and sensibility when both the subject matter and rhetorical decorum ... would seem to call for a colloquial style. ... uses the aureate style appropriate for retrospective narration, instead of a dramatic style appropriate to the presentation of present, immediate action, and hence violates rhetorical decorum.²²

This brief survey of criticism of the Digby Mary Magdalene play indicates that it has been regarded generally as wanting in seriousness, confused in form, lacking in unity, and improper in diction. The critics have judged that the playwright has mishandled his narrative sources and that thus the play is disjointed. This study will therefore examine the narrative structure of this play in terms of the use of a given story and the use of a stage technique that enables the plot to develop progressively

²¹The Drama of Medieval England (Lansing, 1961), pp. 166-167.

²²"The Tavern Scene in the Middle English Digby Play of Mary Magdalene" in All These to Teach: Essays in Honor of C. A. Robertson (ed. Bryan, Morris, Murphree and Williams), 1965, pp. 15, 24.

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toward a climax and an end. Some critics have complained that the language is unskilled and unsuited for carrying the action on the stage; our study in this area will enquire into the play in order to see whether the language used is suitable for dramatic dialogue and sufficiently diversified to handle the variety of scenes, levels of life, and characters found in the play. Our study will attempt to show the inadequacy of the critical evaluation of Mary Magdalene and will examine its craftsmanship along three lines: a) staging, b) narrative unity, and c) diction.

CHAPTER II

DRAMATIC UNITY OF PLOT

The dramatist shows his craft by blending the various strands of plot - no matter what the source - into a well integrated religious drama oriented to the tastes and beliefs of his contemporary audience. Our modern critics have generally missed the point in examining this play - those who have really examined it - principally because, with a preconceived notion that religion and drama do not mix, they have failed to regard the play seriously as drama. They forget, perhaps, that there once existed a medieval world in which this life was a testing ground on the way to eternity. Miss Prosser points to this failure of the critics of our day:

The subject matter, not the form confounds us ... the dramatic critic is not concerned with the given narrative. He is concerned with the playwright's skill in showing how and why events happen.

Does the given play mold the occurrences of the story into a plot, into a tightly interrelated causal sequence? ... "Didacticism and drama have opposing aims and therefore must be in conflict; the greater the interest in the religious point, the poorer the play as drama." This important assumption underlies the approach in Hardin Craig's English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages ... the equation of drama with "amusement" in opposition to religion--but it is this very "either-or" which, it seems to me, blinded us to the mysteries as a fusion of doctrine and drama.²³

²³Op. cit., pp. 11, 59, 189.

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Now the plot of Mary Magdalene is Christ's life as it is interlaced with the life of Mary Magdalene, and also the effect of Christ's redemptive grace upon Mary. It is Christ Who is the unifying factor in the play. Mary mirrors Christ. She lives out His life, becomes united to Him through grace. And as Mary glorifies Him and exists to worship Him, so does the play.

The burden of this chapter will be to examine Mary Magdalene as a theatre piece - briefly to see how it is craftily moulded from its most distant sources into a conventional medieval story. The practical, highly creative staging will be examined in this complex of saint's play, morality, and mystery cycle.

A. Sources

Besides the Legenda Aurea,²⁴ the playwright used the Bible and adapted them both to his fifteenth century milieu. Of these sources Anderson roughly estimates that "slightly more than half of the Mary Magdalene is either based on the Legenda Aurea or inspired by it".²⁵ Hardin Craig cautioned that although Mary Magdalene followed

²⁴William Caxton, The Golden Legend (London, 1931), I-VII.

²⁵Dice Robins Anderson Jr., The Digby Mary Magdalene: A Study of Its Sources, Conventional Elements, and Originality. (unpublished Master's dissertation, Chicago, 1929), p. 14.

the story in the Golden Legend the latter is not the original source; rather, the play is an offshoot of two European plays plus the romantic accretions that grew up around the legend in England:

St Mary Magdalen ... follows in general the legend of St Mary Magdalen as we have it in the Golden Legend, and yet it would be wrong to say that the Golden Legend is its original source. That source is a liturgical play dealing with Mary Magdalen and principally with the Raising of Lazarus as it appears in the Fleury Playbook ... and the Benediktbeuern Passion play. ... These Latin plays form the basis of the story of Mary--her seduction, her life as a prostitute, and her forgiveness by Jesus. One would say that in order to achieve a form such as that of the English play the simple, more biblical play was immersed in the long romantic legend that had grown up around St Mary Magdalen's name--how she was the daughter of Cyrus, a great king, how the devils conspired against her and brought about her seduction, and how, after the event of the liturgical plays, she wrought miracles, converted the king and queen of Marseilles, was fed in the wilderness by angels, and, dying, ascended into heaven.²⁶

Craig is perhaps closer to the truth than Anderson in his estimate of the legendary sources of the play; especially in his statement that the playwright had "the long romantic legend that had grown up around St Mary Magdalene" to draw on. This fact explains in part why certain scenes of the play though apparently based on the Golden Legend vary in many particulars from it.²⁷ But it is the playwright's

²⁶English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages (London, 1955), p. 315.

²⁷In the Legenda Aurea it is St Maxim who is

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own dramatic imagination that plays the chief part here; thus, for example, St Peter, not St Maxim, baptizes the King of Marcyllle, and it is Mary Magdalene who sends the King to Peter:

ye xall thankytt peter, my master, with-owt delay.
 He is thi frend, stedfast and cler;
 To allmythy god he halp me pray,
 and he xall crestyn yow from the fynddes power,
 In the syth of god an hye.²⁸ 1681-85

This substitution subserves the unity of the plot and serves to motivate the scenes of the sailor and his boy, the Queen of Marcyllle's death and resurrection, and the King and Queen's meeting Mary later in Marcyllle. Instead of motivating Mary's fall from grace as the result of a surfeit of riches and desire for delight,²⁹ the dramatist creatively uses Syrus's death as the motive for her depression and adds a touch of social motivation for he has Luxuria, a refined lady-in-waiting, approach her and coyly suggest a need for a change:

ya lady, for all that, be of good comfort,
 for swych obusyouns may brede myche dysese;

associated with Mary Magdalene. He baptizes the King of Marcyllle. By changing to St Peter, the playwright with a master stroke immediately brings us closer to the centre of the story, and brings Christ and Mary together.

²⁸For convenience in typing quotations from the text of the play, *3* and *p* will be typed as *y* and *th*, respectively. Line references will be given by number only.

²⁹Cf. Golden Legend, op. cit., p. 74.

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swych desepecyouns, potyt peynes to exsport,
 prynt yow in sportes whych best doth yow plese. 456-9

Many of the scenes have their original source in the Bible, others are from the Bible by way of the Legenda Aurea. A good instance of the addition of detail to the Bible story may be seen in the second speech of Tiberius Caesar who refers to the Incarnation:

yff ony ther be to my goddes [dis]obedyent,
 dyssever tho harlottes, and make to me declaracyon,
 & I xall make all swych to dye,
 Thos precharsse of crystys incarnacyon. 26-9

This is a masterstroke because it is part of the remarkable craft of enjambement shown in the play: a creative disregard for space and chronology. Although there is nothing unusual about Mary's conversion and repentance in the Gospel, the playwright borrows a definitely medieval stage addition to the story of the devils leaving Mary after her conversion--a thunder clap, the sine qua non of medieval devil stage business. The stage direction at this point (691) reads:

With this word vij dyllys xall de-woyde frome the woman,
 and the bad angyl enter into hell with thondyr.

Sources for the series of scenes in which the devils plan Mary's downfall and accomplish it, (Scs. 7, 8, 9, 10), the sybaritic scene in which Mary awaits her next liaison (Sc. 11), the beating of the devils by other devils (Sc. 15), Christ's appearance in heaven (Sc. 32), Raphael and Mary

(Sc. 33), are distillation of the playwright's vigorous imagination and the topical conventions of medieval playwrights. But whatever the playwright's sources, the aim of his craftsmanship is always the same: unity of plot. In pulling together the story of the interaction of the lives of Mary Magdalene and Christ the dramatist calls upon the Bible, for example, putting into the mouth of Mary the account of the descent of the Holy Ghost, or again drawing upon the apochryphal material, especially The Gospel of Nicodemus, so richly used in the Cycles. The texture of the speeches, particularly the words of Mary herself, is greatly enriched with sententia drawn from a wide range of sources like the Genesis account of creation, and the quoting of the beatitudes. This is the kind of enrichment of the plot that draws it near to the epic style. This may be what Harold Whitaker had in mind in reviewing the play recently produced in Toronto, when he said, "It is nothing if not epic."³⁰ Of course, there is more to it than this that suggests the title epic; there is also the tremendous scope of the story and the action of its fifty-two scenes.

Along with the sources, the medieval conventions which this medieval playwright used may be mentioned

³⁰Mr. Whitaker's review appeared in the Globe and Mail, Toronto, Ontario, March 10, 1969, p. 15.

incidentally and partially.³¹ Prominent among the conventions in the medieval milieu are the ranting rulers,³² the swearing by Mahound,³³ the master-boy farce,³⁴ and the

³¹It would be unprofitable to pursue the whole catalogue of dramatic conventions in *Mary Magdalene*; Anderson has collected these: op. cit., 35-81.

³²See the *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Hardin Craig (London, 1957): The Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors - Erode, 486-528, 777-92, 801-5; in *The Towneley Plays* ed. George England (London, 1897): Cesar Augustus, IX 1-36, 73-84; Herod, XIV 1-48; Herod the Great, XVI 82-99; Pilate, XX 1-27, 560-75; XXII, 1-52; XXIII, 1-28; IV, 1-64; XXVI, 1-30; in the *Chester Plays*, Part I, ed. Hermann Deimling (London, 1892): Octavian, VI, 185-272; Herode, VIII, 153-204, 374-405; X, 1-40; Sathanas XII, 1-4. Part II, ed. Dr. Matthews (London, 1916): Pilate, XVIII, 1-24; in *The York Cycle of Mystery Plays*, ed. J. S. Purvis (London, 1957). Herod, 16, 1-22, 29-39; 31, 1-30; Devil, 22, 1-18; Pilate, 26, 1-29; 30, 1-26; 32, 1-40; 33, 1-24; In the *Ludus Coventriae*, ed. K. S. Block (London, 1922): Herode, 1-20; 29, Herodes Rex, 21-9. In the *Digby Mary Magdalene*: Tiberius Caesar, 1-9; Cyrus, 49-58; Herod, 140-3, 153-9; Pilate, 229-36; King of World, 304-12; King of Marcyllle, 925-37.

³³In *The Towneley Plays*: ibid., p. 82, 122, 127, 140, 148, 151, 162; p. 166, 1; p. 204, 13; p. 243, 3; p. 280, 50; in the *Chester Plays*, Part I, ibid., VIII, 398; in the *York Cycle*: ibid., 31, 9; in the *Ludus Coventriae*: ibid., 20, 35, 209, 30, 369, 34, 1323, 1329, 1335. In the *Digby Mary Magdalene*: Herod, 142-3; Queen of Marcyllle, 1139-42; priest, 1167-8, 1175-6, 1205-6, 1209, 1233, 1237, 1243; King of Marcyllle, 1210, 1221.

Mahomet is regarded as a pagan god. While the medieval man knew full well that Mahomet was not a pagan god, yet because Mahomet had become identified with the great enemy of Christians in the East it was convenient to represent him as one of the worst of evils, a pagan god. The convention was ubiquitous in Middle English. It was particularly useful in medieval drama. Our play continues to use this convention. Thus reference to 'Mahound' as a pagan god or to Pilate as praying to Mahound is not a mistaken notion of history but a convenient use of convention and it had the desired dramatic

copious use of song.³⁵

B. Staging

The playwright of the Digby Mary Magdalene by his adaptations in shaping the conventions to his play showed his facile craftsmanship from the initial use of a ranting ruler to the ending in a liturgical song. The playwright has achieved a medieval milieu for his medieval audience

effect. This was sometimes the occasion of a burlesque service, like that in Mary Magdalene, of sacrifice to Mahound. One might suspect that here was a two-fold dramatic pleasure: a mockery of Mahound, and the fun of a bit of good parody of their own liturgy - a bit of the boy-bishop sneaking in. See the unpublished 1965 University of Ottawa Master's dissertation by Douglas Veitch, The Image of Mahound in Middle English.

³⁴This does not actually thrive on the medieval stage. Anderson mentions it as belonging there (op. cit., p. 57), but it has little currency in the cycles. In the Towneley Mactatio Abel (op. cit., pp. 9-22) Cain's boy is obstreperous and impudent; but this example is one of the few extant. This master-boy kind of farce seems to be popular in Renaissance drama and since the Mary Magdalene is no doubt late, the saucy servant motif is incorporated not as a continuation of a convention common in the medieval theatre but as the beginning of a convention common to the Renaissance and Shakespeare. In the Digby Mary Magdalene the examples are: Priest-boy, 1186-1201, 1143-1229; Shipman-boy, 1395-1422.

³⁵Anderson, op. cit., p. 68, claimed that at the time of the writing of Mary Magdalene this convention was a growing one. This is a valid argument in that songs were being introduced into Renaissance drama and as we saw before Mary Magdalene is late in the Middle Ages. What Anderson has ignored is not only the musical nature of liturgical drama, but the singing of hymns which was a medieval stage practice. Both hymn and song singing are present in Mary Magdalene; another aspect of the craftsmanship of its skilful author. Thus we find singing songs in stage directions after ll. 1227, 1394, 1436.

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in this play. In what medieval, conventional, "contemporary" way does he now put his play on before his audience? What models are at hand which will promote dramatic unity of plot on the stage? The critics speak of three: the round, the mise en scène and the use of the pageant wagon. Before examining these staging techniques for their ability to unite the plot dramatically, a short survey of opinion to date will put the problem in perspective and demonstrate that the problem has not been solved. Joseph Quincy Adams supplied a diagram illustrative of a workable round for Mary Magdalene.³⁶ Adams reasoned that the actors performed on stages situated on the periphery of a circle which enclosed a general acting area, and attention was focused on wherever the action was taking place:

The actors, it is clear, employed a series of "stages" or small platforms, arranged in a circle about a platea or unlocated region (called "the place"), and the attention of the audience was shifted from one platform to the other, or to "the place," as the necessity of the text demanded.³⁷

Richard Southern implied that Mary Magdalene was played in "a Round" such as one finds in the "Castle of Perseverance".³⁸ Hardin Craig repeated most of what these critics

³⁶Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Cambridge, Mass., 1923), p. 225.

³⁷Op. cit., p. 225.

³⁸Richard Southern, The Seven Ages of the Theatre (London, 1962), p. 102.

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conceived the staging to be like, chose the round in which the spectators viewed the play from all sides, and asserted that the sedes were in the enclosure:

The play is continuous in action, a most varied and improbable story, and is one of the best examples of a play played on a stationary stage. ... apparently round, ..., with spectators viewing it from all sides. Within the enclosure were a large number of loca or sedes. All in all it is one of the most elaborate of all known medieval stages in England.³⁹

Katharine Bates posited "probably no less than four scaffolds".⁴⁰ A later critic, Lewis, increased Adams' eight stages to fifteen, based his claim on internal evidence, and found that the production was continuous, the sedes were in a semicircle, and that the properties matched the size of the play:

Internal evidence ... the play was stationary, utilizing an unlocalized "place" for much of the action; that production was continuous, rather than in parts; that the arrangement of the fifteen or more sedes was semicircular; and that the array of special effects and stage properties matched in scope the physical size of the play.⁴¹

The critics, in this short survey of the staging of Mary Magdalene, have spent their time on the peripheral adjuncts of staging. What was not discussed was the

³⁹Hardin Craig, English Religious Drama (London, 1955), p. 316.

⁴⁰Katherine Lee Bates, The English Religious Drama (New York, 1893), p. 156.

⁴¹Leon Eugene Lewis, In an unpublished doctoral thesis, The Play of Mary Magdalene (Ann Arbor, 1964), p. 4686.

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ability of the author's staging technique to forward and unify the plot dramatically. In other words, they did not involve themselves in staging as the putting a play on stage in scene after scene. When the play is thus examined there is found a craft and technique that keeps various strands of the action moving along rapidly and, in a sense, simultaneously.⁴²

The first fact to be remembered is that the play is all of a piece. The division of the play into two parts, and the scene divisions, are not the author's, but Furnivall's.⁴³ Consequently, our knowledge of the author's directions lies in explicit guides given between lines or speeches and within the speeches themselves. A close examination of the text discloses that, as a consequence of these directions, at no time during the play is the audience unaware of what is happening, where the actors are or have been, how the actors are to accomplish their next action, and why they act as they do. In other words, every action is indicated; and ultimately governed by the plot. For example, the King of Marcyllle, baptized by St. Peter and having been away from home for two years, is anxious to return. The playwright brings the home-going

⁴²This is the technique that was continued and later perfected by Shakespeare in the Comedy of Errors, Merchant of Venice, etc.

⁴³Cf. Hardin Craig, op. cit., p. 316.

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onto the stage through "internal" stage directions. The King tells St. Peter, 'now woll I hom In-to my contre' (1859); hails the shipman, 'Hold ner, shepman, hold, hold!'; the cabin boy reports to his captain 'ser, yendyr is on callyd after cold'; the King asks for passage 'ower the se'; the captain welcomes him aboard 'comme In, In goddes name!' commands the boy to set sail for the wind 'is nor west!' All that happens in sixteen lines, with the speed of hailing a taxi and dashing off to the north west of a city; even the direction the boat will sail is moved into the play by our craftsman. The play is replete with such rapidity, it never drags. When it might, this playwright shifts the scene as Shakespeare later did. For example, between Lazarus' resurrection and Christ's, he inserts our first meeting with the King of Marcyllle, and the Harrowing of Hell. What these two scenes do is allow us to know what is going on at the same time that Christ, with Mary involved, is undergoing His passion and death before we meet Him and Mary again near the sepulchre. Continuous, effective action in a play cannot be achieved unless the playwright knows his craft; and the great proof of craftsmanship in this play comes after Christ's ascension into heaven. Ordinarily we would expect the play to drag now that the central character has disappeared but the play does not lose momentum; Mary's thirty years as

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anchoress, for example, pass as an instant.

Still to be answered is the question of how this rapid succession of scenes is actually managed or "staged". Besides the three possibilities that this playwright could have used, Glynne Wickham posits another: that pageant wagons were used on the side of a hill; scaffolds may also have been erected. A stream at the foot of the hill, with an island allowed a boat to be navigated.⁴⁴ This kind of stage is feasible, and is supported by stage directions but in a way that leads me to think that there were only two pageant wagons, one for the devils and hell mouth, the other for the rest of the cast, for example:

Here xal entyr the prynse of dylles In a stage,
 and Helle ondyr-neth that stage, ... (p. 67)

Here xal satan go hom to his stage, ... (p. 76)

Adams and Southern to the contrary, the use of the "round" for Mary Magdalene, with its great number of scenes of varying length, presents too many technical difficulties, would slow down the action, and would not conform to the playwright's directions. The last alternative, on the other hand, the mise en scène, follows the author's directions closely, proceeds with the unfolding of the plot, and makes practicable the rapidity which the

⁴⁴This view was expressed in a yet unpublished paper delivered by Glynne Wickham at the Third Annual Conference in Medieval Studies, Binghamton, N.Y., May 4, 1969.

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author has written into his text.

Kiner in her study finds that these seven places require definite sedes: hell mouth, castle of Madelyn, a tomb, Simon's house, castle of Marcyllle, heathen temple, and heaven. These she arranges in this order from the audience's right to left with hell mouth off the raised stage but opening onto it on the right side and with the other sedes on the back of the stage. The platea runs clear across the front of the stage from hell mouth to the left side in front of heaven. Kiner writes that this type of staging evolved from liturgical drama:

Stationary stages with simultaneous scenery are a logical outgrowth of the liturgical drama; which placed the various sedes along the length of the church.⁴⁵

Brander Matthews describes the mise en scène, the stage for the Passion play at Valenciennes in 1547:

The platform which was to serve as a stage was perhaps a hundred and fifty or sixty feet deep. The front part was generally full and clear so that the actors could move to and fro, while at the back were ranged stations. ... at the extreme left of the spectator was hell-mouth, the fiery cavern where the Devil and all his imps had their abode. Then stretching from Heaven to hell-mouth was a line of mansions, those earliest in use being on the left.⁴⁶

Besides Matthews, Kiner is also indebted to Creizenach⁴⁷

⁴⁵Op. cit., p. 26.

⁴⁶Brander Matthews, "Medieval Drama," MP, Vol. 1, (1903), p. 86.

⁴⁷Kiner, op. cit., p. 30.

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and Schelling⁴⁸ for her main contention that Mary Magdalene was acted mise en scène. But the telling proof she finds in the evidence presented in the play itself:

The chief evidence that Mary Magdalene was written for the mise en scène is contained in the play itself. ... A careful study of the requirements of each scene will show that the play exactly fits the diagram. Scene 1. The Emperor Tiberius speaks, commands silence, as is the custom in many plays. The audience was probably noisy, and since no curtain was provided to show that the play had started, some one of the first speakers ordered them to be still. Sometimes, a later speaker asks for silence again. ... It is supposed that they were already on the stage. ... They probably had chairs in which they sat when they had no lines, with their gorgeous robes making a part of the display loved by medieval audiences.⁴⁹

One practical result of the use of the mise en scène is that as this play proceeds the action moves across the stage towards the sedes for heaven and the other sedes become expendable; for example, Simon's house is burned (stage direction after line 743) by the devils,⁵⁰ and the last time hell mouth is used is in line 992. Kiner suggests that Tiberius, Herod and Pilate sat on chairs until their cues came up. Other claims/^{which} Kiner makes are: since there is no curtain the audience does not know when the play is to begin, and thus the first speaker usually demands silence; many lines used by actors to tell where the

⁴⁸Kiner, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁹Kiner, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵⁰Kiner, p. 43.

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actor is in order to let the audience know when the location had changed (no properties or scenery necessary);⁵¹ and the properties, brought on during the performance may have been left on "as they so often were on the later Tudor stage."⁵²

What the mise en scène⁵³ does is unite the plot by its staging. We follow the actors across the stage as scene follows scene rapidly. We have already seen that the play began in medias res. Sententious speeches by the potentates looked to the past in epic review. Syrus introduced us to the present, and after a long interval the potentates return to tell us what has gone by in another epic review. From there on we are in the present again until the play closes. All this the mise en scène staging permits the craftsman to do in this play. In a word, the mise en scène allows us to follow the simple plot of the intertwining of Christ's life and Mary's and the result of Christ's redemption on Mary, on the King of Marcyille, and by extension, on ourselves.

Still one critic, Anderson, believes that the

⁵¹Kiner, op. cit., p. 10: "This custom of self location for the sake of the audience, who had little stage setting and no programs to help them, persisted well into the Elizabethan drama."

⁵²Kiner, p. 11.

⁵³Kiner, op. cit., pp. 33-63: She takes each scene in turn and examines it in the light of her theory.

unity of the narrative is broken in two ways: first by the seven scenes in which the three potentates, Herod, Pilate, and Tiberus Caesar, are involved; secondly, by the King of Marcyllle's entrance, scene 21 between the Raising of Lazarus, scene 20, and the Resurrection, scenes 23 to 25, and by the "Harrowing of Hell", scene 22. The first break Anderson considers an unpardonable obstruction to the smoothness of the dramatic action⁵⁴ the second a structural error.⁵⁵ But Anderson fails to see that his first break is part of the plot; Christ's life is limned in both before and after the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection in the scenes with the potentates. Anderson failing to see this craftsman's plot and apparently believing that the play is indeed the story of Mary Magdalene alone naturally finds the potentates breaking into the narrative at the beginning and after the Resurrection. But these three potentates are part of Christ's life and are adroitly worked into the play by the dramatist. The second kind of break is used extensively by Shakespeare and has caused critics and audiences no problems. If it could be proved that this craftsman was the first playwright to use this technique, then this avant-garde technique should rather be hailed as a breakthrough than a fault. Another instance of the same

⁵⁴Op. cit., p. 86.

⁵⁵Op. cit., p. 86.

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breaking of major theme with minor occurs in the series of scenes 11, 12, 13, 14. Scene 11 in which Mary is waiting for her liaisons, follows the scene in which the devils are gloating over her downfall. Scene 12 differs entirely; in it Simon the Leper is hoping that Christ will come to dinner. But in Scene 13 we are back with Mary, who is being exhorted to repentance by the 'good angyl', and Mary and the audience hear the key note on which her conversion rests, God's 'mercy' (600); and in Mary's soliloquy that follows she tells us that it is Christ that she will now seek and serve. And in scene 14 we see Mary's repentance and forgiveness at Christ's feet. The technique is the same here as in the scenes to which Anderson objected. Here is a completely new character introduced into the play: Simon the Leper, who has no connection with the wanton Mary or Christ up to this point. And even then it is not until a scene later that his house becomes the Confessional for Mary Magdalene, and the plot is in full bloom again. Shakespeare uses this technique of interweaving major and minor scenes in the Merchant of Venice. There, for example, the second scene of the play interrupts the action of the first and third which deal with the bond while the interruption introduces Jessica and the lottery. Certainly unity was not destroyed by Shakespeare's action nor is it by the craftsmanship of

the Mary Magdalene dramatist. What happens is that we become acquainted with the King of Marcyllle, fill in the time lapse between the raising of Lazarus, the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection. But Anderson considers this introduction of the King of Marcyllle and the Harrowing of Hell a structural error which destroys the unity of the play. The introduction of the King is rather a triumph in contrast; it whets the audience's interest, as Shakespeare does later with Falstaff in Henry IV, Part 1 or Edmund in King Lear; and the Harrowing of Hell is merely a continuation, a recounting of what has happened to Christ since last we saw Him at the Castle of Magdalo. Campbell has a practical answer for the introduction of these two scenes.⁵⁶ He suggests that Mary Magdalene had to change her black dress for a white one after Lazarus' resurrection and her appearance in the sepulchre garden as the stage direction after the Harrowing of Hell directs:

Here xall enter the iij mariis a-rayyd as chast women,
with sygnis ofe the passion pryntyde vpone ther breste,
...

This is plausible but does not answer the reason why these particular scenes are introduced.⁵⁷ Campbell continues,

⁵⁶Op. cit., pp. 28-30.

⁵⁷Campbell's idea here does not concern staging but points up the use of a stage convention. The change in clothes signified what the actors were doing and what had happened to them; for Mary Magdalene dressed in black is not the apostless she is when dressed in white.

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however, and tries vainly to answer Anderson's "problem"; he sees comedy in the King of Marcyllle's introduction, and discounts the author's desire to show us Christ's life:

... he [the author] has a tendency to introduce a new phase of his plot by a scene which, along with its comedy and relaxation of the dramatic tension, gives a hint as to the types of incident and character that are next to be dealt with. Scene 21 is of this sort. The poet takes this opportunity to show the audience ... his next most important figures, the king and queen of Marseilles.

Scene 22 covers even a greater multitude of difficulties. Also it is strong evidence that the writer had no concern whatsoever in presenting events in Christ's life, no matter how dramatic they might be or how essential from the standpoint of biblical narrative, unless they had some bearing upon the life of his heroine. ... yet her life is inseparably involved in the greater story. The problem ... is to indicate the range of these events in which Mary Magdalene does not figure, and to prepare the audience for the next great moment in her life. The scene at Christ's tomb. ... he has the events reported. ... the harrowing of hell ... a well known and highly popular part of the mystery cycle. ... sure ... to make a strong appeal to the audience. Nothing, therefore, better illustrates our writer's consciousness of his subject and its aim and limits than his rapid narrative, rather minute dramatic treatment of these and other events in Christ's career which are necessary in the play only as locating points for the various experiences of his main character.⁵⁸

Campbell misses the fact that the plot is Christ's life continued and reflected through the life of Mary Magdalene, and entirely escaping him is the integral use in the plot of the doctrine of the Redemption; unable to see the craftsmanship in the play he sees only what will divert

⁵⁸Op. cit., pp. 29-30.

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and delight the audience. Campbell also labours under the burden of proving his thesis that the play is about the life of Mary Magdalene alone; Christ's life is for him, therefore, irrelevant in the play, even though he is forced to admit that "her life is inseparably involved in the greater story."⁵⁹

Another element closely allied to staging, costuming, is slighted by most of the critics. They usually remark on the grandeur of the robes of the potentates, following the lead of the potentates themselves, who draw attention to their wardrobes. But E. Martin Browne explicitly distinguishes between the dress of the major characters and the supporting cast, and makes the point that the properties are contemporary; any resemblance to the properties used in Jewish times is coincidental, the properties have been medievalized:

... [costumes ... contemporary]. The conception of characters is entirely in contemporary terms. ... no sense of periods as we think it: no sense that because this story actually happened in Palestine a great many years ago the people must therefore appear different. The characters, are thought of in terms of their counterparts in the life around the players. ... The action of the Mystery Play is imagined as happening directly to the people taking part in it; any idea of what we call period is entirely absent. ... This involves the complete omission from the production of everything to do with oriental Palestine or with Rome of Judaism. It involves seeing

⁵⁹Campbell, op. cit., p. 29.

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everything in terms of medieval English life, and finding for these characters who in modern biblical 'period' plays would be clothed in Palestinian or in Roman or Jewish garb, their counterparts in the life of medieval society.⁶⁰

Ostensibly, Browne is treating of the Mystery Cycles but by extension his tenets hold for Mary Magdalene as well. Thus Mary Magdalene will be dressed as the daughter of a feudal lord of Medieval times, and the potentates will dress like princes, bishops and papal nuncios, while the messengers and minor characters wear the dun colors of the time:

The clothes of the minor characters will be very simple, rough, sometimes skimpy, based upon the jerkin, the hood and the stockings ... mostly to be of the colour of earth, and in fact, a great variety of shade can be introduced into such a scheme. It is a mistake to colour the whole stage too brightly in a medieval production. The minor characters who form the background for the major characters, who should shine forth from the center of the scene like brilliantly colored jewels. The background will consist of the colors of the earth worn by men of the earth, and the color of steel worn by the soldiers in chain armour, which, by the way, should not be polished. This is a feudal society, in which strict degrees of order are adhered to, and those who stand in high place not only can afford, but also are obliged to dress in rich and ample materials.⁶¹

We can readily imagine Mary Magdalene along the lines Browne has drawn for us: a play full of magnificent costumes contrasting with the drab earthiness of the costumes

⁶⁰E. Martin Browne, ed., Religious Drama 2 - Mystery and Morality Plays (New York, 1958), pp. 13, 14, 306.

⁶¹Browne, op. cit., pp. 307-8.

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of the minor characters.

C. Composition of the Plot

Having demonstrated how the dramatist crafted his staging to fit his plot and to enable him to manage a wide variety of scenes smoothly and in quick succession, let us now look at the plot itself. What were its components? What does it involve? Was it conceived as an abstract morality or a quasi-cycle? Does the plot really integrate the play which Wells says is a "mixture of saint-play, mystery, and morality"?⁶²

We have already noted the difficulty that some critics have in interpreting the plot in this play. As Prosser says, "The subject matter, not the form confounds us..."⁶³ Unable to abstract the plot from "the subject matter", the critics spend their time analysing the play for some other esoteric reason. For instance, taking the cue from the modern critic who seeks character development in a play, some of these critics hasten to condemn Mary Magdalene for its lack of character development, or see character development under the guise of a psychological theory or an "ism" like naturalism or realism. Thus A. P.

⁶²John Edwin Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400 (New Haven, 1916), p. 574.

⁶³Op. cit., p. 11.

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Rossiter, who treats the play as a morality, finds that the dramatist "uses allegorical figures to present psychological changes".⁶⁴ George R. Coffman seems to think that the dramatist has substituted realism/naturalism for character development:

... though the play contains a personification of the seven deadly sins, the technique is not that of the morality, it is not symbolistic, but realistic and direct. Thus, in the temptation scene, Mary becomes tired of staying at home and goes away to an inn - just as would happen today. A young man comes along and carries on a naturalistic seduction.⁶⁵

Coffman, along with other critics, not finding entertainment in this dramatic craftsman's use of scenic variety or in the plot, seeks it in naturalism. Observe how Anderson misses the purpose of the plot, which alone gives the reason for the dramatist's "clever psychological stroke"; at least Anderson is right about characterization:

The student naturally expects no more depth of characterization in the Mary Magdalene than he finds in any of the plays of its time. ... The idea of subjecting Mary to temptation at a crisis of her life, when she was grieving greatly for the loss of her father and missing his restraining influence, is one of the happiest features of the play, a clever psychological stroke worthier of a better day.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Cf. English Drama (London, 1966), p. 102.

⁶⁵Cf. "The Miracle Plays in England Some Records of Presentation and Notes on Preserved Plays," SP, XVI (1919), p. 65.

⁶⁶Op. cit., p. 90.

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Anderson finds that character development exists in the play when the speeches are natural and the actions realistic; he gives examples:

... the scenes in which the character development takes place have a considerable degree of naturalness in the speeches and realism in the actions. ... Mary's expression of a feeling of degradation at her appearance in Simon's house, her thankfulness upon her salvation by Jesus, and her joy at returning home re-made, have a sincere ring, in spite of a tendency to religious formula in the speeches.⁶⁷

The dialogue, he believes, exhibits naturalness in the conversation of Mary and Coryossyte (511-46), the conversation of Mary and the shipman, in Mary's account of the creation (1482-1526), the King of Marcyll's first speech to his wife after their dream (1619-26), and the King's reply to the Queen when she desires to go with him to the Holy Land (1702-04); the latter relates the universal wonderment of man over the vagaries of a woman:⁶⁸

A-las! the wyttes of wommen, how they byn wylld!
And ther-of falllytt many a chance.
A! why desyer it? and yow ar with chyld. 1702-4

The scene in which the shipman suggests that the King is running away with someone else's wife, and forgets his allegation on the show of gold, Anderson considers "realistic":⁶⁹

⁶⁷Op. cit., pp. 90, 91.

⁶⁸Op. cit., p. 91.

⁶⁹Op. cit., p. 91.

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yee, butt me thynkytt, so mote I the,
 so hastily to passe, yower spendyng is thyn;
 I trow, be my lyfe,
 thou hast stolllyn sum mannes wyffe;
 thou woldyst lede hyr owt of lond.
 never-the-les, so god me save,
 lett se whatt I xall have,
 or elles I woll nat wend.

rex.

Ten marke I wyll ye gyff,
 yf thou wylt set me vp at the cleyff
 In the holy lond.

nauta.

set of, boy, In-to the flod!

1732-43

Two more instances of Anderson's idea of character development by means of naturalistic speech or realistic action, are recounted by that critic as well as an example of sincere emotion:

More sincere than most emotional passages is that with which the King takes leave of his dead wife and son on the rocky isle: (1792-97) ... Shipman to his boy on the return voyage of the King is typical of the sort of realism with which the reader is refreshed at times; (1876-79). ... natural ring of the sorrow of the King and Queen of Marcyllie upon Mary's departure for the wilderness (1977-89). These various instances show that not all of the dialogue is conventional and burdened with Latinisms.⁷⁰

What Anderson really means by character development is character portrayal, for there is no character development in the examples he cites, even when these examples are "sincere", "realistic", "naturalistic", and are free of conventional language and Latin tags. Inadequately

⁷⁰Op. cit., p. 91.

realizing the principle around which and on which the dramatist shaped the plot, Anderson attempts to interpret the play in terms of what will entertain a "modern" audience and disregards all that will not, according to his lights. But Anderson does not realize that the dramatist's characters are merely conventional here. What, then, is the principle on which this dramatist creates his characters, other than the principle of conventionality?

Eleanor Prosser is of help here; she claims that a character is judged good in so far as it fulfils its function in a play:

... a character is not judged "good" by standards of reality, by the degree to which it mirrors a real person. Characterization is judged good by the degree to which it serves its function in the given play.⁷¹

Anderson attempts to equate characterization and realism/naturalism, and does not realize that for the dramatist of Mary Magdalene the plot is paramount and the characters are conventional; their function in the play is to subserve the plot. But Anderson errs also in attempting to answer what Eleanor Prosser calls the irrelevant question in the dramatic criticism of the mysteries; and confusing realism with the end of drama, rather than treating it as a means of expressing dramatic probability:

... much of the so-called dramatic criticism of the

⁷¹Op. cit., p. 60.

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mysteries has been devoted to the irrelevant question: "Does the play contain realistic pictures of contemporary life?" ... the value of the realistic details is historic, not artistic.

Realism, ..., should be evaluated as a means, not an end. ... realism is only one device of creating dramatic probability. ... The critic is concerned, ..., not with the actuality of life but with the playwright's establishing of probabilities by whatever means he chooses.⁷²

Anderson's criticism here, then, is irrelevant, for the attempts to separate the realistic and the natural from the conventional; and errs in equating good drama with the use of normal, natural conversation, and poor drama with the use of conventional dialogue. All misjudging of the play stems from the same root cause: a misconception of the principle on which the dramatist crafted his play. We may go a step further than Eleanor Prosser's idea of function, and come closer to the principle on which the dramatist creates this play. And the step involves seeking a "universal form" for the play; in fact O. B. Hardison following Aristotle thus relates plot and "universal form":

... Aristotle asserts that the playwright should reduce his material to its "universal form" before proceeding to the more particular phases of composition. The "universal form" of a drama is the outline of the main steps of its action. This outline may or may not be identical with the arrangement of the episodes in the finished work. In drama based on aesthetic criteria the universal form is intrinsic to the action imitated. In drama written to

⁷²Op. cit., pp. 61, 62.

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illustrate didactic or psychological principles--homily and allegory, (for example)--the universal form is extrinsic to the action, which is shaped to fit it. Drama based on fidelity of source, historical or otherwise, occupies a middle position between these extremes. The source is the universal form. If this source is aesthetically coherent, the drama will be coherent; if it is formless, the drama will be, as well.⁷³

Since the sources of Mary Magdalene are aesthetically coherent, the drama has form and coherence. Furthermore, the characters, since they subserve the plot in the play, are also aesthetically coherent. For example, Jusserand finds that the dramatist draws the character of Cyrus as a conventional, typical, feudal lord:

Le type du seigneur riche, honoré, plus qu'orgueilleux, de la famille d'Hérode, se croyant, lui aussi, quelque peu des rois, type bien connu au Moyen-Age, est personnifié dans Cyrus, le père de Marie-Madeleine. Il énumère avec une complaisance de gros propriétaires ses châteaux et ses manoirs, les provinces entières qu'il possède;... Il note avec une tranquille satisfaction, les éléments et les effets de sa grandeur; il voit bien loin audessous de lui la foule misérable, il est comme le château féodal à côté de la hutte du serf.⁷⁴

As in his creating of Cyrus, so in the creating of his daughter, the playwright fashions her as the plot demands at the moment. We, therefore, must not seek character development in Mary Magdalene. The critics, in

⁷³O. B. Hardison, Jr., Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1965), p. 258.

⁷⁴J. J. Jusserand, Le Théâtre En Angleterre (Paris, 1881), pp. 87-88.

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the main, have not - we cannot emphasize this too often - understood the playwright's plot: the life of Christ and His redemption of mankind, and Mary Magdalene, a human being, whose life is intertwined with His, but who, as one of His creatures, falls into sin and is redeemed. Erring in their plot interpretation, the critics err consequently in their assumption as to what the characters should undergo at the hands of the playwright. The story in Mary Magdalene, woven together by its craftsman, is one that celebrates a rite that ends in joy and love and thanksgiving.

Missing the import and impact of the plot, the critic seeking motivation in the play, likewise finds little, for the actual graces that move Mary Magdalene act mysteriously and instantaneously as instantaneous was her fall from grace. Admittedly, the Mary who converts the King of Marcyllle and his wife is a more mature and grace-filled creature than she was when first met at Bethany, but there is no gradual development during the play. In other words, what is happening is that the plot works on the characters, takes them as they are at any instant and shapes them to its purposes.

In working out the purposes of the plot, the crafting of the play, the playwright is objective, the character's fall and conversion is objective. The

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characters that the playwright brings on the stage are completely probable, completely credible, as they form the background to the lives of Christ and Mary. Among these background characters, the devils to the medieval audience are credible, demonic; they represent evil, the opposite of good, are God-haters and man-haters--because God loves man. These beings strive to bring man to everlasting damnation. Of all the actors in the Mary Magdalene, the devils are least understood by the critics. Usually they are thought hilarious. There are moments, of course, when they are ridiculous, but their real function is to strike terror and lead men to repentance and love of God. The critics' failure to understand this is due, Alfred Harbage argues, to their inability to respond to the poet's beliefs:

An age cannot respond deeply to a poet, masterful though he be, unless it responds to what the poet stands for.⁷⁵

And Eleanor Prosser supports Harbage's dictum by saying that at least if the modern man cannot believe the same way as the medieval world did, he can and must give his "intellectual assent" to the medieval playwright:

We shall never be able to experience medieval drama fully, for we shall never be able to offer a playwright our wholehearted agreement with his view of the world and of man. But we can prepare

⁷⁵Quoted in Prosser, op. cit., p. 182.

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ourselves to offer him, in Lionel Trilling's term, our "intellectual assent".⁷⁶

Let us observe the playwright's craft in fashioning Mary of Magdalo. All is going well for Mary: well-born, rich, her father dotes on her, and her brother and sister care for her. Suddenly her world shatters with the death of her father. Sadness depresses her. But note this is as unsentimentally treated, as is the next step in her career: the temptation. Like the first phases of all sin, Mary's is delightful. The good angel chides Mary and us for being 'on-stabyll', warns of the sorrow sin brings, pinpoints the cause of our sin, 'thi pore pryde' which can put her soul in hell fire. And the good angel's parting admonition shows the able artistry of the playwright:

A! remembyr how sorowful ittis to a-byde
with-owtyn eynd in angur and Ir[e]!
remembyr thee on mercy make thi sowle clyr!
I am the gost of goodnesse that so would ye gydde.
598-601

Mary, with this tremendous motivation, the mercy of God, responds instantaneously, tolls out her lament, her anguish, and her sorrow for her sin, and promises repentance:

I xal porsue the prophett, whereso he be,
for he is the welle of perfyth charyte;
be the oyle of mercy he xal me relyff.

⁷⁶Op. cit., p. 182.

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with swete bawmys I wyl sekyn hym this syth,
and sadly folow his lordshep in eche degre. 610-14

No character development occurs, but Mary's soul experiences different emotions. This dramatist creates Mary an "instant" character when the plot requires it. These examples of Mary Magdalene show the fact that following his plot, the dramatic craftsman limns it out according to specifications. This specification of character is true of all the other characters in the play. No character is elaborately drawn; we have no realistic picture of any one in the whole play. No character changes from within; no character develops internally or psychologically by his own power. Mary Magdalene is a sinner at one moment, a saint at another; and the reason is external. The plot works on the characters; and the characters work with the plot. Mary Magdalene, for example matures, in age, in wisdom, and in grace by cooperating with God's grace (1587-88; 2054).

Another critic of the play shines an interesting sidelight on Mary's character which he assumes to be introspective; L. E. Lewis thinks the play traces Mary Magdalene's journey to spiritual perfection; and to help his thesis along he also considers that the play deals in symbolism:

Structurally the play seems episodic, unified only by the figure of Mary, and intended merely as

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a sensational presentation of the main events of her life. But within this framework are a number of symbolic elements of repetitive forms which tighten the work structurally and lend dramatic direction to the episodes. The theme of pilgrimage, or the journey to spiritual perfection, underlies the surface diversity, giving the story a basic and dramatic progression which is at once meaningful for and easily identifiable by the medieval audience, and which makes the modern view of the play as divisible into two halves seem unnecessary. Further, the apparently careful grouping of character types at definite stages of Mary's progress points to a conscious attempt on the part of the author to dramatize the basic pilgrimage theme, and gives meaning to some episodes which have been seen as dull or anticlimatic. Finally, the playwright's treatment of his main source, the Golden Legend, gives evidence of his awareness of the elements of effective drama, and of his intention to fashion and produce a forceful portrait of Mary's struggle toward perfection--regardless of "rules".⁷⁷

Lewis sees in Mary Magdalene: (i) a number of symbolic elements, and (ii) Mary's journey to spiritual perfection. This is completely unjustified--it is part of the rather wretched habit in recent years of trying to read allegory and symbolism in everything medieval.⁷⁸ Mary's conversion was instantaneous; she, throughout the play, seems unaware of any pilgrimage to spiritual perfection. Lewis, summing

⁷⁷Op. cit., p. 4686.

⁷⁸Cf. Theodore Silverstein, "Allegory and Literary Form", a paper delivered at the 80th annual meeting of the MLA, Chicago, Dec. 28, 1965; Paul E. Beichner, C.S.C., "The Allegorical Interpretation of Medieval Literature", a paper read at the same meeting on the same day; these authors both decry the use of allegorical interpretation in medieval literature save where the medieval author lets his reader/auditor know that this was his intent.

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up Mary as a character, finds her a refreshing contrast to the stiff Biblical characters, but feels that the public has abandoned her for comic characters:

Ironically, Mary, who had achieved dramatic prominence as a refreshing contrast to the stiff figures of the Biblical narrative, has herself been canonized and dehumanized. She like many other miracle play heroes, has lost her attraction for the average Christian playgoer who is becoming more interested in the comic figures and personifications--those characters who come to dominate the moralities and interludes of the next dramatic age.⁷⁹

This kind of criticism has no value. Lewis merely says that Mary as a character in this play is unappealing to him, and then assumes that the medieval audience reacted similarly and took refuge in the comic.

The Digby Mary Magdalene is a miracle/saint's play. The dramatist crafts his play to bring this out. But the play is plotted and crafted on a canvas capable of epic and Mystery Cycle scope. It is quite possible that some artists of the time were looking for a means of conveying the essential materials of a cycle without following the long chronological process from the creation of the world to doomsday. An attempt seems certainly to have been made in Mary Magdalene, where a surprisingly large amount of story and doctrine from the cycle is conveyed, though attenuated, and spread piecemeal and unchronologically throughout the play. The play, then, besides being

⁷⁹Lewis, op. cit., p. 4685.

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a miracle play is also in large degree a mystery. And the life of Mary Magdalene is a suitable subject for this fusion, since she touches the life of Christ at the most crucial points: Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Through an extension of their commerce together--the apocryphal source of the Legenda Aurea, her mission as an apostless, etc.--further incident and dogmas essential to salvation history as in the cycles are supplied. Some of the cycle incidents woven into the story of Mary Magdalene's life, will be briefly noted, as will some of the essential dogmas of faith which, made explicit at certain points in the cycle, are given in this play by flashbacks, asides or explanations (with very little "story" motivation at times).

The first event common to cycles in the play is mentioned obliquely by Tiberius Caesar. He orders his provost to slaughter the Christians, the preachers of Christ's Incarnation (26-9). The playwright has Herod's philosophers provide him and us with the Scripture account of the Nativity and the rule of this 'myty duke' in Israel (171-6; 180-5). The first reference to the Old Testament, the Fall of the Angels, appears in Satan's first speech (364-7). The dramatist then weaves much of the public life of Christ into his play, especially those episodes in which the lives of Christ and Mary meet. Thus Simon

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the Leper's house becomes the locale where we first meet Christ in the midst of His apostles, where we hear the parable of the two debtors, and where Mary Magdalene is forgiven by Christ. The story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, the latter's death, Christ's foretelling of His death, and His recalling of His birth, passion, resurrection, and the redemption, and Lazarus' resurrection. The shrieking devil who describes the harrowing of hell by the King of Joy, brings to mind Christ's passion, crucifixion, the release of Adam, Abraham, 'and alle hyr kynred' (977); that is, a great deal of the Old Testament story, Christ's resurrection and present location: Galilee, the devils' attempts to tempt Christ. The holy sepulchre scenes that follow fill in some of the details lacking in the devil's recital of the harrowing of hell. In them Christ shows particular solicitude for Mary Magdalene and consoles Mary Jacobe and Mary Salome. Christ tells them to instruct His apostles that He will visit them bodily in Galilee. Pilate recalls Christ's unjust death, His crucifixion, His burial; and announces that He has risen, and that Joseph of Baramathye has removed the Body. Herod on hearing of Christ's death is overjoyed. The account of Christ's claim to be King of the Jews, His crucifixion, death and burial, His claim to be divine, the trumped up story of the disciples

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stealing Christ's Body from the tomb; all these facts are read to Tiberius Caesar by his provost. In the next scene Mary Magdalene, besides telling of the death and resurrection of Christ, reminds the audience for the first time of the ascension and the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, after which they could understand all languages. Christ appears in His glorified Body, lauds the purity of His Mother and her part in the Incarnation, and sends Raphael to bid Mary to convert the land of Marcyllle. Mary, when she first meets the King of Marcyllle, emphasizes that it is Christ's Redemption that will accomplish the King's conversion and ultimate salvation. Catechizing the King, Mary recalls to mind who Christ is, what the Trinity is, God's power, and the Little Genesis account of the creation of the world.⁸⁰ Mary admonishes the King to practise the corporal works of mercy both towards herself and the poor. St. Peter's catechizing of the King of Marcyllle brings clearly before the minds of the audience the dogmas of the Trinity and of the sacrament of baptism; and his advice to the King of visiting Nazareth and Bethlehem recall the Nativity and Hidden Life of Christ to this medieval audience. The Queen, too, has been to the

⁸⁰W. Bridgwater and S. Kurtz, eds., Columbia Encyclopaedia Third edition (New York, 1963), p. 1735: Under the heading Pseudoepigrapha the Book of Jubilees or Little Genesis (c. 100 B.C.) is described as a "history of the world, ending with the giving of the Law on Sinai".

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Holy Land, where she saw the true cross and the Holy Sepulchre, and made the stations as her husband had done. Christ's sermon on the mount is recalled when Mary paraphrases some of the beatitudes. In this rather natural but easy-going, leisurely way these facts in the life of Christ are told by the actors in asides and flashbacks intermingled with the activities of Mary Magdalene, who is the thread holding all of them together. With Mary's retirement to her hermitage, where she lives for thirty years, equalling Christ's thirty years of Hidden Life, the play speeds to a close--a joyful example of a happy death that is well prepared for, and a source of worship and thanksgiving to God.

Similarly, the directly dogmatic or instructional side of the cycle, the salvation story is introduced not as didactic lessons or forensic argument but as being normal to the whole medieval milieu. Instruction of a proselyte gives the occasion for the exposition of Christian dogma. All the machinations of the devils in the play hinge on the motivation that Satan is out to revenge himself on mankind, who now basks in God's friendship which the devils had lost. And Mary Magdalene's conversion is managed so simply by the artist-playwright that many critics would judge it naive. Forsaking the spectacular, like St. Paul's lightning-bolted conversion,

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the playwright has the Good Angel appear to Mary and admonish her. What could be simpler and more plausible? But the motivation is doctrinal and capsulated in a single line: 'remembyr thee on mercy make thi sowle clyr!' (600). And the motivation for Christ's exposition of forgiveness in Simon the Leper's house is simply that which Simon desired: to have Christ as a dinner guest. And throughout the instruction Simon is the brunt, and the person for whom it is ostensibly. Mary Magdalene, motivated by the King of Marcyllles' thirst for knowledge of God, recounts the story of Creation (the first pageant in the Cycles). The ten commandments, prominent in some of the cycles (Chester, York, Ludus Coventriae) find their place here though adumbrated. Thus the King of Marcyllle when he asks St. Peter for baptism is instructed by the saint on the truths necessary for salvation and the life of a Christian; above all, Peter warns, avoid Satan and keep the commandments:

& alle-only for-sake the fynd saternas,
 the commavndme[n]ttes of god to have In kepyng.
 1830-31

As the play draws to a close and Mary draws towards her judgment day, a holy old priest who has been allowed by God to see the angels going and coming from Mary's hermitage approaches the hermitage and Mary sizes him up as a

man of 'devocyon'.⁸¹ The priest's instructive reply is an encomium of what the priesthood is all about:

In crystys lav, I am sacryed a pryst,
mynystryyd be angelus at my masse.
I sakor the body of ower lord Iesu cryst,
& be that holy manna I leve In sowthfastnesse. 2066-69

This last reference is like the instruction that the Five Wits delivers to Everyman. All in all the playwright's skilful introduction of these particular expository discourses (short and long), is close to the technique of Everyman.

What we see above is not an entire mystery cycle but enough to give the "feel" and the sweep of a cycle. It would not be facetious to call Mary Magdalene a cycle in miniature, a mini-cycle, for Christ's life from His Incarnation to His Ascension, and the Creation to Judgment Day are outlined vividly, though without much of the detail in the Old Testament parts of the Mystery Cycle.

We have shown that Mary Magdalene is part saint's play and part mystery cycle. It is part morality as well. This is clearly seen in those scenes in which the preparation for Mary's downfall, her seduction, and her subsequent recovery are detailed by the devils. The tavern scene especially contains two Vices, Luxuria and

⁸¹The lives of Christ and Mary are still interacting. Her need for Christ's help as death approaches is fulfilled by the presence of this alter Christus, this holy old priest.

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Coryossyte, who are the proximate instruments of Mary's fall from grace.

But what is most essential in Mary Magdalene is that its plot is limned against an epic-cycle background. This gives the play its great impact on us. The Redemption of Christ has its microcosmic effect on a creature who becomes a saint, Mary Magdalene, and its macrocosmic effect on her and all other postredemption creatures, ourselves. The playwright then, shows his craftsmanship by weaving his simple plot into the canvas of the cycles, and in doing so gives his drama unity.

CHAPTER III

THE DICTION OF THE PLAY

This chapter will study the language used in Mary Magdalene to see to what extent the playwright shows himself a craftsman in diction, to discover whether it is suitable for the dramatic dialogue, and sufficiently diversified to handle the variety of scenes, levels of life, and characters. Four kinds of language found in the play will be examined during this study: aureate, dignified, simple, and comic. Alliteration will first be touched upon in so far as it is involved with aureate and dignified diction. But before the dramatic aptness of the language in the play is assessed, a few principles should be considered. Discussing the economy of the drama, Thompson shows the primacy of speech (diction) as the key to characterization and dramatic "action":

To observe dramatic economy a play must have continuous "action" ... the principal form of dramatic action is speech ... the dramatist cannot, like the novelist, talk about his characters, we know them only by what they do (which is mainly what they say); and what they do constitutes the action. Thus, characterization is known to us only through action, and action is the principal concern.⁸²

Consequently the dramatist must choose his words with

⁸²Alan Reynolds Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama (Los Angeles, 1946), pp. 115 and 118.

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care or hamper the action and destroy the play. Richard Southern succinctly summarizes the essence of the drama:

The essential thing to which everything in theatre finally boils down is the performance of the living player,⁸³ and what is of assistance to that performance.⁸³

How often the modern movie and theatre critics lament the playwright's language being so jejune and lifeless that the star, doing his utmost, cannot make the audience react to the play! If then, diction, which is part of "what is of assistance to that performance" is to be pat to the purpose, it must first come alive in the playwright's soul before it can stir the audience. George R. Coffman applies these principles to the Corpus Christi Plays and concludes:

The essence of drama is the appeal to the emotions by the representation of imaginary personages through speech and action.⁸⁴

Campbell, when discussing the poetic form of Mary Magdalene, complains about the mediocrity of its language:

Language seldom, if ever, rises to any dramatic height, and is for the most part exceedingly mediocre.⁸⁵

Similarly, Miss Bates, who lumps the Digby Plays with the Mystery Cycles, finds them all weak in diction:

In verbal expression they are almost invariably

⁸³The Seven Ages of the Theatre (London, 1962), p. 18.

⁸⁴"A Plea for the Study of the Corpus Christi Plays as Drama", Stud. Phil., XXVI, 424.

⁸⁵op. cit., p. 79.

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weak and bald, but on the medieval scaffold-stage the actor counted for more than the author.⁸⁶

Adding to this chorus of lamentation, Anderson when discussing in Mary Magdalene the speeches of Tiberius Caesar (1-34) and Herod (186-92) judges the diction dull:

Their speech is thoroughly conventional play language, formal and dull.⁸⁷

Anderson remarks that some of the language is so appalling that it is unessential:

... two hundred out of some two thousand lines making up the Digby play are devoted to speeches as unessential as this (that is, Tiberius Caesar (1-34); Herod (186-92)).⁸⁸

Again, in recounting the playwright's use of servile courtiers, he tallies that they appear thirty five times in more than one hundred lines of useless and unnatural speech:

... of almost entirely useless and unnaturally formal, subservient speech.⁸⁹

Suppose these critics are correct, how did the plays survive on the stage for centuries? Surely the dramatist must have had some kind of rationale or reason for this use of language? Have critics missed a nexus here between plot and language? What these critics do not see, it

⁸⁶Op. cit., p. 35.

⁸⁷Op. cit., p. 40.

⁸⁸Op. cit., pp. 40, 41.

⁸⁹Anderson, p. 44.

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seems, is that convention does not equal dullness. We have shown that this play moves along literally and emotionally. The play is in fact so fast-paced that we, except by an effort, do not especially notice the author's language. Thus the question remains: What kind of language did the playwright select to build his play? The simplest answer is that he gave the characters the language appropriate to their function in the play, and the mood of the moment. For example, to have Tiberius rant solidly every moment he is on the stage would be silly, and the playwright shows his mastery by avoiding this and showing other moods even in a tyrant. Hence, Tiberius in a tone and mood of the happy official, expansive and bon vivantly enjoins his retainers to dine and wine:

so, thee froward folkes, now am [I] plesyd;
 sett wyn and spycys to my consell full cler.
 Now have I told yow my hart, I am wyll plesyd;
 Now lett vs sett don alle, and make good chyr. 45-48

For even in the opening minutes of the play this craftsman-dramatist varies the ranting speech of Tiberius with a speech that is quiet, subdued and thoughtful of others; a speech more akin to those of the more introspective characters.

A. Alliteration

This first language form which we shall examine, alliteration, is used on the one hand by the ranters -

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Tiberius Caesar, Syrus, Herod, Pilate, and the King of Marcyllle, and most of the devils; and on the other hand, by the more reserved characters: Mary, Martha, Lazarus, the good angyll, the primus miles at Lazarus' death bed, the Queen of Marcyllle, the priest's boy and the priest.

Alliteration is used in Mary Magdalene by three distinct groups of people: 1) the pompous and regal, 2) reticent and 3) servants. As the play begins Tiberius Caesar is quietening the restive audience with his de-claiming:

I command sylyns in the peyn of forfeitur,
to all myn avdyeans present general.
of my most hyst and myttest wolunte,
I woll it be knowyn to al the word vnyversal,
That of heven and hell chyff rewlar am I,
to wos Magnyfycens non stondyt egall,
for I am soveren of al soverens subjugal 1-7

Syrus is Lord of Jerusalem and wants the audience to acknowledge it for Syrus claims:

I command yow all, obedyent to beyn;
wo-so woll nat, in bale I hem bryng,
And knett swyche cayftyys in knottes of care.
thys castell of mavdleyne is at my wylddyng,
with all the contre, bothe lesse and more,
& Lord of Ierusalem, who agens me don dare.
Alle beteny at my beddyng be; 56-62

In true ranting style Herod admonishes the philosophers who have informed him of Christ's regency:

A, owyt, owyt, now am [I] grevyd all with the worst!
ye dastardus! ye dogges! the dylfe mote yow draw!
with fleyng flappes I byd yow to a fest.
A swerd, a swerd! thes lordeynnes wer slaw!
ye langbaynes, loselles, for-sake ye that word!

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that caytyff xall be cawth, and suer I xall hem flaw;
for hym, many mo xal be marry with morder. 186-192

The Roman Pilate comes on stage resplendent in cope and
mitre and proclaims:

now ryally I reyne In robys of rych/e/sse,
kyd and knowyn both ny and ferre,
for Iuge of Ierusalem, the trewth to expresse,
Ondyr the emperower tyberius cesar. 229-32

The King of the World, full of himself, enters from Hell's
Mouth and cries

I am the word, worthyest that euyr god wrowth, 305
Satan, the Prince of the Devils, sums up his character,
his purpose in life, and his chief targets in three al-
litative lines:

Now I, prynse pyrked prykyd in pryde, 358
satan ower sovereyn, set with euery cyrcumstanse, 359
the bolddest in bower I bryng to a-baye; 363

And the last character who rants as a ruler is the King of
Marcylle, who in complete contrast with the tranquility of
the ending of the preceding scene of Lazarus' resurrection,
shouts commandingly to his underlyings in eight continuous
alliterative lines (the longest alliterative speech in the
play):

A-wantt, a-want the, on-worthy wrecchesse!
Why lowtt ye nat low to my lawdabyll presens,
ye brawlyng breeelles, and blabyr-lyppyd bycchys,
obedyenly to obbey me with-owt of-fense?
I am a sofereyn semely, that ye se butt seyld;
non swyche onder sonne, the sothe for to say;
whanne I fare fresly and fers to the feld,
my fomen fle for fer of my fray. 925-32

The high-flown alliteration is used to indicate rulers here and in the cycles. In the York cycle, for example, Herod tries to impress the Three Eastern Kings and begins:

The clouds clapped in clearness that their climates
encloses,
Jupiter and Jovis, Martis et Mercurii amid,
Raking over my royalty on row me rejoices
Blustering their blasts, to blow when I bid.⁹⁰

Later in the same cycle Pilate is addressing his court and exhorts the mob:

Ye cursed creatures that cruelly are crying,
Restrain you for striving For strength of my strokes.
Your plaints in my presence Use plainly applying,
Or this brand in your brains Soon bursts and soon
breaks.⁹¹

Strangely, the minions of the King of the World and the Prince of the devils speak alliterative lines now and again. This may be unexpected, but is not surprising, for, as servants of important figures, they assume some of the Master's airs. This is but a further example of the playwright's articulate craftsmanship. Note, too, how the servitor-devils are characterized. The King of the Flesh, dainty, and precious, minces onto the stage and gives himself away:

I, kyng of flesch, florychyd in my flowers,
Of deyntys delycyows I have grett domynacyon. 334-5

⁹⁰Cf. J. S. Purvis, ed., The York Cycle of Mystery Plays (London, 1957), p. 103.

⁹¹Op. cit., p. 221.

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Satan informs the audience that he can subdue the holiest person by his two retainers, wrath and envy. Following Satan's encomium, Wrath, a servant, speaks for himself alliteratively:

with wrath or wyhyllles we xal hyrre wyne. 377

Envy, co-conspires with wrath in inveighling Mary Magdalene:

or with sum sotyllte sett hur in synne. 378

The King of the World, being naturally worldly wise, sends sensuality to the King of the Flesh to order him to a council at which Satan will plan the downfall of Mary Magdalene. Sensuality hails the King of the Flesh with a three line paeon, the first line of which is the alliterative

Heyl, lord in lond, led with lykyng! 398

Even Satan is not all rant when he speaks an alliterative line; though this line still tells us he is in command:

Serys, now ye be set, I xal yow say: 414

The King of the Flesh fulsomely praises his spouse, lady lechery, in an alliterative line that becomes him, the sybaritic flower devil:

for yow be flower fayrest of femynyte; 423

The bad angyll, servant to Satan, having been instructed by Satan to join battle, knows what he is about and cautions the devils who will aid him in overcoming Mary

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in these two chastening alliterative lines:

speke soft, speke soft, I trette hyr to tene,
I prey the pertly make no more noyse. 438-39

Lechery, as she makes her first play to win Mary Magdalene to evil, compares Mary's radiant beauty to that of the sun.

Bryter than the bornyd, is your bemys of bewte. 443
The alliterative lines so far cited may be reviewed here to note the action, the aliveness in the speech; for the next example is an alliterative line in which the devil is beside himself with joy at Lechery's victory over Mary Magdalene:

a! how I tremyl and trott for yese tydynges! 555
Still in character, the King of the Flesh departs from Satan, using an alliterative line so full of dreamy sibilants that parting is veritably a "sweet sorrow":

fare-well, sem [1] yest all sorowys to sesse! 563
Satan in the heat of temper screeches out this alliterative line upon hearing that the good angel has outwitted his minions:

A, owt, owt, and harrow! I am hampord with hate! 722
And in a laver of self pity Satan pouts in this fine alliterative line:

with thes betyll browyd bycheys I am at debate. 724
One more example from the minor devils should be sufficient to demonstrate the playwright's skill at portraying

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nuance and emotion by the use of alliteration in the first group. The Prince of the Devils enraged at Mary's return to grace is paid grovelling obeisance by his servant, spiritus malignus:

as flat as fox, I falle before your face. 730

In the second category of users of the alliterative line in the play are the reticent, reserved characters. The first example in this group is Tiberius Caesar's messenger, who hails Pilate as royal and princely:

Heyll, ryall in rem in robis of rychesse!
Heyl, present thou prynsys pere! 249-50

Lazarus overcome by the death of Syrus in a line of falling fricatives grieves:

in feyntnes I falter, for [th]is fray fell; 280

Martha adds to the sorrowful mood at her father's death by this heavy line:

A! how I am sett in sorowys sad, 291

Mary Magdalene, enthralled by all the young men she is meeting, sums them up in a happy alliterative line:

for they be bote for a blossom of blysse; 566

The good angel, in a key speech in which he is the har-binger of grace, admonishes Mary quietly and firmly in two memorable alliterative lines:

ful bytterly thys blysse it wol be bowth; 589
salve for thi sowle must be sowth, 594

And to aid her to save her soul the good angel offers her

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help in an alliterative line that is as generous in g's as it is comforting in mood:

I am the gost of goodnesse that so wold ye gydde. 601
 Inside of twenty lines the playwright turns from joy to sorrow. Mary is telling Lazarus about Christ's goodness to her, how He has removed the dark cloud of sin from her soul, and contends that He is

of lyth the lucens and lyth veray, 770

A few lines later (783) Lazarus becomes deathly sick and Martha exclaims in sorrow:

A! I syth and sorrow, and sey, a-las! 788

Illustrative again of the variety of occasions and characters to which the playwright applies the alliterative line is the primus miles, a bystander at Lazarus' death bed, who echoes Mary Magdalen's prayer (824-825) in the alliterative line of comforting g's:

goddes grace mott be hys governour, 826

The King of Marcyllle has already been cited as a ranting ruler who spoke alliterative lines. In his private life the King of Marcyllle, happily married, praises his spouse in alliterative lines:

I have a favorows fode, and fresse as the fakown,
 she is full fayer In hyr femynyte;
 when I loke on this lady, I am lofty as the lyon;
 942-44

She in his sight the King adds is
 of delycyte most delycyows,

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of felachyp most felecycows,
 of alle fodys most favarows,
 o! my blysse! In bevteus brygth!

946-49

In her reply the Queen of Marcylle, after thanking the King, her husband, for his 'recummandacyon' (951), eulogizes the King and promises to keep herself chaste and enjoyable for him alone.

the bovntheest, and the boldest onder baner bryth!
 no creatur so coroscant to my consolacyon!
 whan the regent be resydent, ittis my refeccyon;
 yower dilectabyll dedes devydytt me from dyversyte;
 In my person I privyde to put me from polucyon;
 To be pleyant to yower person, ittis my prosperyte.

952-57

But the King continues to praise his Queen's beauty and disposition, for before the scene ends he alludes to these qualities:

now godamercy, berel brytest of bewte!
 godamercy, rubu rody as the rose!
 ye be so ple /s/avnt to my pay, ye put me from peyn.

958-60

The use of alliteration in this scene is singularly effective for the following reasons: (i) the King and Queen of Marcylle are being introduced to the audience for the first time, and since their story looms large in the rest of the play the audience is warned of their importance; (ii) the King, although introduced as a "ranting ruler", is also shown to be a fond lover of his wife; (iii) the Queen's love in turn for her husband raises the couple onto a plane that separates the King from the other rulers

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in the play and places them in an aura of suspense in the eyes and ears of the audience. Minutes later, the devil who reports Christ's harrowing of hell broken-heartedly recounts in this alliterative line the destruction of their stronghold:

that wondyr-full worke werkytt vs wrake. 976

The alliterative line in Mary Salome's speech is one of sheer matter-of-fact reverence

Thatt blyssyd body with-In this bovndes 1019

When the King of Marcyllle announces a jubilee in honour of his gods, his Queen invokes the powerful Mahomet in two alliterative lines that may easily be chanted:

mahond, that is so mykyll of myth,
with mynstrelly and myrth In mynd, 1140-41

At the end of his raffish epistle to Mahomet, the priest's altar boy breaks off his butchered Latin and continues the incantation in Middle English:

Howndes and hogges, In hegges and helles, 1198

Note how the playwright has caught the King of Marcyllle's tone of exasperation in this alliterative line:

A-las! the wyttes of wommen, how they byn wylld! 1702

Heaven opens, Mary Magdalene's soul is commended by herself into God's hands, the angelic choirs sing and the priest who brought her extreme unction utters an alliterative line that is compressed yet full of praise:

O! good god! grett is thi grace; 2124

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But if the playwright has used alliteration purposefully his use of aureate language is even more cogent.

One notable feature of some of the alliterative lines in Mary Magdalene is that they contain aureate diction, which is the second language form that we will examine. But first a few alliterative lines in which aureate diction is found. Here are two samples from Tiberius's opening boast:

for I am soveren of al soverens subjugal	7
so of all soverens, my magnyfycens most mytyest	14

And much later we find the Queen of Marcyllie heaping praise on her husband:

no creatur so coroscant to my consolacyon!
whan the regent be resydent, ittis my refeccyon; 953-4

The aureate words appearing in the above quotations are: subjugal, magnyfycens, coroscant, consolacyon, and refeccyon.

B. Aureate Diction

We have run ahead of ourselves here and must now define the term aureate precisely and then discuss the aureate diction in Mary Magdalene. Stephen Hawes with great solemnity declares that it is the poet's duty to tell

... the tale in terms eloquent
The barbary tongue it doth ferre exclude
Electyng words whiche are expedyent
In latyn or in englysshe after the entent

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Encensynge out the aromatyke fume
Our langage rude to exyle and consume.⁹²

But the use of aureate language is not so stilted as Hawes employed it. For example, Schirmer, in discussing Lydgate's use of 'aureate terms' impresses us with Lydgate's efforts to achieve originality and sonority:

... his 'gilding', that is to say, refinement of language by introduction of so-called 'aureate terms', mostly polysyllabic and sonorous Romance words, which were new or which he employed in an original way. Lydgate does exactly what Chaucer did before him, but goes further in piling words one on top of another. ... By using such a florid poetic language Lydgate, in contrast to Chaucer, seeks to reproduce Latin words comprehensible to humanistic scholars, and words of marked sonority. Even where it is not a matter of new terms, he prefers the recondite polysyllabic and generally Romance word (*merciable*, *redolent*, *benigne*, *curteyse*) to the simple familiar expression. As a result of the example set by Lydgate, this 'poetic diction' came to predominate in fifteenth-century verse.⁹³

The use of aureate language flows from a conviction, as indicated in its use by Hawes and Lydgate, that the English language should be embellished. C. S. Lewis, calling it "aureation", defines exactly what aureate diction is, and points out that it was used both aptly and fashionably in the fifteenth century:

⁹²See H. S. Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century (Oxford, 1947), p. 130.

⁹³Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate (London, 1961) (Tübingen, 1952), pp. 73, 74: Lydgate wrote between the years 1400 to 1450 (roughly).

... aureation, i.e., the use of polysyllabic coinages from Latin (celsitude, jocundity, lachrymable, ...) as an ornament of style. ... In its weaker disciples aureation, ..., becomes less a kind of poetry than a substitute for poetry; ... In the good poets the aureation can be enjoyed. The long, surprising words are to be savoured slowly on the tongue and pronounced with deliberate pomp. Their effect is one of costliness; 'far fetched' - ... - must be felt as an adjective of praise. They are in language what the gorgeous armours and tournament were in life; the proper expression for a vision of brightness, largesse, ceremony, exhilaration.⁹⁴

Mendenhall in his definition is more succinct than C. S. Lewis and adds the elements of sententiousness, rarity, and critical approval:

... words designed to achieve sententiousness and sonorous ornamentation of style principally through their being new, rare, or uncommon, and approved by the critical opinion of the time.⁹⁵

Sister Mary Philippa Coogan points out that the use of aureate diction was a sign of a man of learning:

The ability to use aureate terms was, indeed, a social asset. It identified its user as a man of learning, and conferred on him a certain distinction.⁹⁶

The authorities quoted treat aureate language as if the critical reaction to its use were totally serious. But

⁹⁴Clive S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), pp. 75-76.

⁹⁵John C. Mendenhall, Aureate Terms, Ph.D. Dissertation for the University of Pennsylvania (Lancaster, Pa.: Wickersham, 1919), p. 14.

⁹⁶Sister Mary Philippa Coogan, An Interpretation of the Moral Play, Mankind (Washington, 1947), p. 101.

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there were others who saw that its excesses were laughable.⁹⁷ Thus New-Gyse in Mankind quips to Mercy, who uses high-flown Latinized speech:

Ey, ey! yowur body ys full of Englysch Laten! 124

Shakespeare, through Feste in Twelfth Night, laughed at the abuse of aureate diction; there, Feste, asked by Sir Andrew Aquecheek if he had received the sixpence he had sent him, replies:

I did impeticos thy gratillity, ...⁹⁸

In this vein we find a rather florid use of aureate language on the popular stage in parts of Mankind (1475) and the Castle of Perseverance (1425). These are contemporary with the Mary Magdalene playwright in using aureate language. Also contemporary and using aureate diction are the dramas: Play of the Sacrament (1471), Magnyfycence (1516), Coventry Corpus Christi Plays (1534 MS. of Robert Croo), and the Ludus Coventriae (c. 1468).

The first fact about the use of aureate language in Mary Magdalene is one that E. K. Chambers noted about its use in Mankind: "... aureate language is deliberately confined to the serious characters."⁹⁹ The second fact is

⁹⁷Cf. Sister M. P. Coogan, op. cit., p. 98.

⁹⁸Twelfth Night, Act. II, sc. 3.

⁹⁹E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1947), p. 61.

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that the playwright uses aureate language in abundance.

Before analysing the kind of aureate words found in Mary Magdalene we should ask to what extent the playwright was coining new ornaments of aureate diction or to what extent he was pursuing and developing a style of vocabulary already current in 1520. In order to answer the question we have examined sixty random words, undeniably aureate, taken from Mary Magdalene. Searching the date of their entry into the language as recorded in the O.E.D.,¹⁰⁰ we found that only eight words were listed as coming into the language with Mary Magdalene.¹⁰¹ Most of the words listed had entered the English language between 1340 and 1400. The earliest entrance date was 1225. This small sampling shows that the aureate diction used by the Digby Mary Magdalene playwright is not avant-garde but contemporary and conventional.

The aureate language in Mary Magdalene is well controlled. It is carefully selected with a very definite theatrical effect in mind. One of the commonest instances of its use in the play is in the conventional entrances

¹⁰⁰Oxford Dictionary (A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles), (Oxford, 1933).

¹⁰¹This is not an exhaustive study, for such a study remains to be done as a work in itself; the words listed as entering with Mary Magdalene are: debonarius (444), delectary (751), delycyte (444), dysstonddyng (196), potencyall (9), puernesce (322), subiectary (752), and subjugal (7).

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and introductions of rulers. This is most apt in the opening speeches as it accords with the rich robes of the ruler. Thus in his bombastic entrance Tiberius Caesar's use of aureate language is full of pomp, circumstance, and delightful gusto. With what sheer joy and great swelling of chest he declaims:

I woll it be knowyn to al the word vnyversal,	4
to wos Magnyfycens non stondyt egall,	
for I am soveren of al soverens subjugal	6-7
tyberyus sesar, wos power is potencyall.	9

Added to the ringing end of these aureate words, 'vnyversal, Magnyfycens, egall, subjugal, potencyall', is the ictus of alliteration in lines 7 and 9. We at once grasp the character of Tiberius Caesar: bombastic, commanding, and self-assured. And in his next speech, after giving his provost rule over and care of the local population, "all your pepull preserve in pesabyll possesson" (25), Tiberius warns that all who disobey him will die, so, therefore, separate the Christians out:

dyssever tho harlottes, and make to me declaracyon,	
& I xall make all swych to dye,	
Thos precharsse of crystys incarnacyon.	27-9

The character of Tiberius Caesar has been established in his first speech as awe inspiring and fearful but here with the use of the weighty aureate words, 'possesson, declaracyon', and 'incarnacyon', the playwright emphasizes Tiberius' ability to administer - the alliteration also

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adds to the administrative patina. The playwright is conscious of choice of diction for portraying action, emotion, and character from the opening moment of the play.

In contrast with Tiberius Caesar, Herod who usually rants does use some gloriously aureate language. He boasts of his suzerainty over the provinces and points out that Tiberius and he are equals:

Lo, all thes I hold with-owtyn reprobacyon;
No man is to me egall, save a-lonly the emperower
tyberys, as I have In provostycacyon. 161-3

Herod shines in golden glory only in so far as he is 'egall', 'In provostycacyon' with Tiberius Caesar and rules over his provinces without 'reprobacyon'. When, then, his bodyguard has soothed his rage at the philosophers who told of Christ's coming role in Israel, his use of two aureate words, 'exsortacyon', 'replycacyon', tells the audience that his self-image as coeval with the imperial Tiberius Caesar has been restored:

now thys is to me a gracyows exsortacyon,
& grettly reioysyth to my sprytes in-dede;
thow thes sottes a-yens me make replycacyon, 201-3

The playwright in the diction in Herod's speeches shows Herod's self-love, self-esteem, temper on being crossed, hatred of Christ, and cunning and especially the last, for after being pacified by his toadies, he is in control of himself again and connives with his mean mind:

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I woll suffer non to spryng of that kenred;
 some woys in my lond shall sprede,
 prevely or pertely in my lond a-bowth:
 whyle I have swych men, I nede nat to drede,
 But that he xal be browt onder, with-owtyn doth. 204-8

In contrast to both Caesar and Herod, Pilate's speeches though he rants in two alliterative lines to let the audience know he is a ruler, a man in command, are lower keyed, gentlemanly, becoming to the 'Iuge of Ierusalem' (231). Pilate uses no aureate diction: thus the playwright, following the plot, places the three potentates in a hierarchy by their use or non-use of aureate diction. The quietness of Pilate's approach on the whole, compared with the other two rulers, laying down the law; but discreetly, diplomatically, and assuredly:

... I rede you all, be-warre
 ye do no pregedyse a-yen the law,
 for and ye do, I wyll yow natt spare
 tyl he haue Iugment to be hangyd and draw; 233-6

The diction used for these three potentates unites them in a hierarchy of rule, emphasizes and fulfils the plot, adds variety and shows that like Renaissance writers the playwright is conscious of his diction and has used it maturely. Also noteworthy is the playwright's ability to unite mood and diction: the benign fear inspired in the audience by Tiberius Caesar, the hatred aroused by the power-loving Herod, and the affection aroused by the just and able Pilate.

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When the playwright comes to Syrus he introduces him bombastically but without aureate diction. Seemingly, the dramatist wishes to tell us that although a ruler, he is not in the same class as Tiberius or Herod. But Syrus does use aureate diction when he begins to describe his family; he begins with Lazarus:

no comlyar creatur of goddes creacyon,
to amyabyll dovctors full brygth of ble,
ful gloryos to my syth an ful of delectacyon.
Lazarus my son, in my resspeccyon.
Here is mary, ful fayr and ful of femynyte,
and martha, ful [of] bevte and of delycyte, 67-72

The aureate words, 'creacyon, delectacyon, resspeccyon, femynyte, delycyte', indicate Syrus's lordship, his love for his family, and his refinement. Again we find that the dramatist makes almost the same distinction with the King of Marcyllle for he, too, uses no aureate diction in his opening rant, but an abundance of aureate diction when expressing his love for his wife, whom he claims is:

of delycyte most delycyows,
of felachyp most felecyows,
of alle fodys most favarows,
o! my blysse! In bevteus brygth! 946-9

Here with his hyperbolic use of the aureate words, 'delycyte, delycyows, felecyows, favarows, bevteus' the King indicates his joy and happiness towards his spouse; regal language for a Queen.

One of the most famous of aureate scenes in Mary Magdalene is the tavern scene. But does the dramatist

overdo the use of aureate language and style here? Does a scene suffer by the use of artificial diction throughout? Reading the scene, one needs a conscious effort to advert to the aureateness of the diction while reading what appears to be no more than a conversation among people who meet in a high class liquor lounge. The dramatist so constructed the scene that the aureate vocabulary in contemporary use becomes conventional and almost colloquial in the play. Robert H. Bowers objects to this reasoning - according to him the aureate style is undramatic. He charges the Digby playwright with wrongly using the high aureate style:

... the high style is essentially laudatory, ceremonial, retrospective, and sentimental; ... the low style is colloquial, naturalistic, immediate, and unadorned. Hagiography presents a simplified romantic memorial: it denies error and dilemma in its memorialized hero, it glosses over lightly the complexities and confusions of human motivations and feelings - ... It is ... the opposite of a dramatic style that explores and exploits the confusions of human motivations, the immediacy, the stress of the human condition. But the ... author of the Digby play of Mary Magdalen, ..., uses the aureate style appropriate to a presentation of present, immediate action, and hence violates rhetorical decorum.¹⁰²

Reading the play aloud, using the eyes of the imagination, listening to a recording of the play, or seeing it performed, we discover the aureate diction and style no

¹⁰²Op. cit., pp. 19, 24. Incidentally, "The middle style is explanatory or expository, or politely conversational;".

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barrier to dramaturgy, and, moreover, feel that the tavern scene is one of the highlights of this ongoing play. Bowers' basic worry is that the playwright has heretically disobeyed the canon of the "three major rhetorical styles"; specifically, using a high style when a low colloquial style was called for. But (and Bowers has not alluded to this) a playwright is a pragmatist. If aureate language aids the plot, gives the characters definition, and adds to the enjoyment of the audience, then it may be used. Listen, then, to the urbane taverner who opens the scene in his "upper-class London tavern":¹⁰³

I am a taverner wytty and wyse,
that wynys haue to sell gret plente.
of all the taverners I bere the pryse
that be dwellyng with-inne the cete;

470-3

The style is aureate, the diction colloquial. But Bowers fails to realize that aureate speech/style can be used colloquially. More damning is Bowers' claim that the dialogue does not individualize the characters:

The main characters all talk in aureate language, far from the colloquialism or immediacy of even upper-class speech ... there is no effort or desire on the part of the author to individualize his main characters by their speech.¹⁰⁴

And yet in two lines the taverner is writ large in the mind's eye: shrewdly sizing up the well dressed ladies

¹⁰³Op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰⁴Op. cit., p. 28.

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who have entered, he suavely lets them and us know that like all great taverners he can tell merry tales and solve the weighty problems of his patrons; and typically good taverner that he is, he attends immediately to business with a quick reminder that his cellar is well stocked with wine. But the accent is on the aureate language and style: the playwright signals the quality of this tavern through the quality of diction the taverner is given; the taverner's diction varies with the clientele.

Bowers insists that Mary is corrupted before entering the tavern:

It is important to note that Mary is corrupted before she enters the tavern.¹⁰⁵

This shows that he cannot unravel the artistry of the playwright, who has Mary in the previous scene meet a friendly and well bred travelling companion, Luxuria, who suggests that Mary cure her depression by a change of pace:

ya lady, for all that, be of good comfort,
for swych obusyouns may brede myche dysese;
swych desepcyouns, potyt peynes to exsport,
prynt yow in sportes whych best doth yow plese. 456-9

Nor does Bowers realize that to remove Mary from her usual haunts will, as the devil knows, prepare her for solicitation. The tavern scene would be anticlimatic, if Bowers

¹⁰⁵Op. cit., p. 27.

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was right; worse, it would be dramatically useless. Bowers also failed to notice that the playwright calls Lechery, Luxuria: Mary went to finishing school. How luxuriously comforting and soothing to a sorrowing young woman, a protected young debutante are Luxuria's words to her on their first acquaintance:

most debonarius, with your aungelly delycyte! 444

Nor has the dramatist here avoided what Bowers calls "serious consideration of the human condition"¹⁰⁶ by using aureate language. Syrus in his informative speech near the beginning of the play recounts how close-knit his family is; the affection, one for the other, seeps through and out of the children's speeches of thanks to their father who has, in effect, read his will to them. Syrus's deathbed scene increases our knowledge and esteem for this upper-class family in the ruling strata of Bethany. Consequently, we can only, surely, sympathize with the heroine when from her very soul she confides to the kindly and sympathetic Luxuria the root cause of her sadness and listlessness:

for my father, I haue had grett heuynesse;
whan I remembyr, my mynd waxit mort. 454-55

We are involved because the characters are. And when Luxuria suggests to Mary that they rest and sip wine, we

¹⁰⁶Op. cit., p. 30.

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are already aware that Luxuria is a devil, and know that this is the beginning of the playwright's imaginative portrayal of Mary's fall:

lo, lady, the comfort and the sokower,
go we ner and take a tast,
thys xal bryng your sprytes to fawor.
Taverner, bryng vs of the fynnest thou hast. 481-4

The playwright's diction is again equal to his task: what would be more mannerly than that Mary should follow the courteous request of this mistress of ceremonies. Bland and polished, the taverner blends in with the mood of the older lady:

here, lady, is wyn, a re-past
to man, and woman a good restoratyff;
ye xall nat thynk your mony spent in wast,
from stodyys and hevynes it woll yow relyff. 485-8

Even if there was a fleeting suspicion in the minds of these cultured women that the tavern had a noisome reputation, the taverner's genteel, aureate diction will allay it: the clever distinction between a male drink and a light female medicine; and if, perhaps he may have been a little forward in suggesting that distinction, he then appeals to the female fear of wanton waste, by alluding to the cost and immediately returns to the medicinal and psychological value of the word 'restoratyff'. Even in this bit of action may be seen the skill of the craftsman. Bowers asserts that the aureate language and the posturing of the characters in the scene prevent

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consideration of living and human problems:

In addition, one feels that the aureate language and the posturing of the main characters are almost calculated euphemisms, society devices employed by the author to keep vitality at a safe distance far from the manor, and to avoid serious consideration of the human condition.¹⁰⁷

Yet Mary is charmed by the courtesy and attention that the taverner is expending on them and graciously compliments him:

I-wys ye seye soth, ye grom of blysse;
to me ye be covrtes and kynde. 489-90

The diction is still on the high aureate level; the action is still present tense; a vitally alive Mary Magdalene has given away a verbal bouquet. The next speech, that of the gallant, Coryosyte, is the most exacting speech in the play, for if it is poorly played, or misinterpreted, the fall of Mary will not follow dramatically. Anderson chooses to think the gallant plays his part for laughs:

... his dandyish manner and speech made the audience roar with laughter. ... Though the rollicking, roystering, dandyish manner is characteristic of the fully developed Vice, there appears to be some kinship between this sort of character and the more fiery ranters of the potentate type.¹⁰⁸

Arrogance, a note of command, and ranting are absent in the gallant's opening gambit. He uses no alliteration. In his whole speech there is no indication that he is a

¹⁰⁷Op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁰⁸Op. cit., pp. 78, 79.

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man in authority or can inspire fear in a subordinate. If this gallant lacks the ability to lead as the playwright implies in his diction, is he then, trying to be funny, or is he uproariously so as Anderson vouches. The audience, sensitively aware of the devil and his kind, is aroused to hatred for this particular dandy in a sort of reverse comic empathy. It is beyond common sense to expect a comedian to twist a laugh out of the first lines of the gallant's opener;¹⁰⁹ he is thirsty and to the bystanders, who mistake his business, he is curt:

Hof, hof, hof, a frysche new galavnt,
 ware of thyrst, ley that a-doune!
 what! wene ye, syrrys, that I were a marchant,
 be-cavse that I am new com to town? 491-4

What at first sight looks like the perennial, jovial entrance of Santa Claus is the equivalent of "Here, waiter!" He follows this invocation up by introducing himself to the men at the bar, declares his thirst, and requests the barman to set the drink before him. Having dissuaded the men from taking him for a travelling salesman, he begins to impress them with his man-of-the-worldliness.

The diction becomes a gallant. The gay, light,

¹⁰⁹This is assuming that the lines 491-2 belong to the gallant. If the lines, and it is conceivable that they do, belong to someone else, the taverner for example, then these lines can be given a comical interpretation. And we may translate the lines in this way: "Ah ha! here's a thirsty gallant, watch the fun we'll have now!"

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and inconsequential mood with the vocabulary of dalliance which the gallant uses, adds to the modish, high aureate style. Capturing the ears of the men by preferring a pretty face to business, he spins out a monologue on his choice of clothes, his conquests in love, his taste in dressing and his sartorial attempts to appear elegant and youthful to coy maidens. The playwright picked his words consciously with telling effect. The effect is one of metallic sheen, bright and 'ressplendant', elegant and foppish.

with sum praty tasppysster wold I fayne rown;
 I haue a shert of reynnes with slevys peneawnt,
 a lase of sylke for my lady constant.
 a! how she is bewtefull and ressplendant!
 whan I am from hyr presens, lord, how I syhe!
 I wol a-wye sovereyns; and soiettes I dys-deyne.
 In wynter a stomachyr, In somer non att al;
 My dobelet and my hossys euer to-gether a-byde;
 I woll, or euen, be shavyn, for to seme yyng;
 with her a-yen the her, I love mych pleyyng;
 that makyt me Ileyant and lusty in lykyng;
 thus I lefe in this word; I do it for no pryde. 495-506

The gallant emerges from his speech full of himself, distainful and purposeful: seduce Mary. But these comments of ours are retrospective, and hinge on two dramatically ironical lines:

I wol a-wye sovereyns; and soiettes I dys-deyne. 500
 thus I lefe in this word; I do it for no pryde. 506

This gallant as will appear later is the devil, pride, who distains man and is as proud as hell when he inveigles a man. But the mood in which the actor will play the role

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will be stylized, bright, elegant, and urbane in keeping with the tone already begun before Lechery (Luxuria) and Mary met.

Luxuria makes the introduction, (so common in a tavern) suggesting to Mary that the gallant will help her to banish her malaise:

lady, this man is for yow, as I se can;
to sett yow I sporttes and talkyng this tyde. 507-8

Mary asks the taverner to bring the young man to their table:

cal hym In, taverner, as ye my loue wyll han,
& we xall make ful mery yf he wolle a-byde. 509-10

If the gallant's speech had been played as comic relief rather than with the finesse of a gallant, then it is inconceivable that the lady-like Mary, though mellowed by a little wine and trusting her travelling companion, would have invited a loudmouthed clown over to converse with her. On receiving the invitation the gallant, Coryossyte, glides over to Mary's table; Luxuria has discreetly withdrawn. With dramatic instancy Coryossyte plies his avocation aureately:

A dere dewchesse, my daysyys Iee!
splendavnt of colour, most of femynyte,
your sofreyne coloures set with synseryte!
conseder my loue in-to yower alye,
or elles I am smet with peynnes of perplexite! 515-19

This eloquent encomium, consistent with the playwright's characterization of Coryossyte in his first speech,

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surprises the unsuspecting Mary, and no fool she asks if he has mistaken her for a woman of the street:

Why, sir, wene ye that I were a kelle? 520

Coryossyte tactfully sidesteps an argument and continues to press his cause:

nay, prensstes parde, ye be my hertes hele,
so wold to god ye wold my loue fele. 521-2

Mary is still skeptical, but she has accepted his plea of loving her as being sincere, her womanly vanity has been fanned:

qwat cavse that ye love me so sodenly? 523

The villain's reply is that of an accomplished lady's man, exactly right, its diction perfectly chosen; it rings with courtly sincerity:

o nedys I mvst, myn own lady,
your person, ittis so womanly,
I can nat refreyn, me swete lelly. 524-6

Coyly Mary replies:

sir, curtesy doth it yow lere. 527

We observe the playwright demonstrating the sequence of temptation. So far the devil has succeeded in flattering Mary's vanity by appealing to her good looks, her ability to make a man fall in love with her, now after complimenting her flatteringly on her good breeding he presses further: the physical contact of the dance. (The devil, wise and wily, tries this new and quicker approach: physical

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contact.)

Now, gracyus gost, with-owtyn pere
Mych nortur is that ye conne;
But wol yow dawns, my own dere?

528-30

It is ironical that Mary's curiosity, which involves her with lechery is the name of her unknown antagonist. By now Mary must realize or deeply suspect that her guest may be an occasion of sin for her. And the tempted must acknowledge the temptation for what it is, reject it, and do something else. But the tempted can let pride rule and dally with the tempter. This Mary does, and the playwright compounds her acquiescence by her courtly compliment on paying homage to men:

sir, I asent In good maner;
go ye be-fore; I sue yow ner;
for a-man at alle tymys beryt reverens.

531-3

The Vice, Coryossyte, seizes the bridgehead immediately and attacks her vulnerable and generous heart by his solicitude over her sorrow. In a speech full of action the Vice consoles her, orders a drink, is reflective, orders sops-in-wine, and assumes that Mary, too, will like his choice in drinks:

Now, be my trowth, ye be with other ten;
felle a pese, taverner, let vs sen,
soppes in wyne, how love ye?

534-6

Mary is all acquiescence, voices her happiness in their meeting, and admits that she is beginning to love him:

As ye don, so doth me;

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I am ryth glad that met be we;
 my loue, In yow gynnyt to close. 537-9

With Mary's admissions of the state of her conscience,
 Coryossyte drives her beyond the point-of-no-return by
 seeking to find out how far she trusts him, and if she
 will now, having had some food and drink, go to some
 other place:

Now, derlyng dere, wol yow do be my rede?
 we haue dronkyn and ete lytyl brede.
 wyll we walk to a-nother stede? 540-2

Mary replies:

Ewyn at your wyl, my dere derlyng!
 thowe ye wyl go to the wordes eynd,
 I wol neuer from yow wynd,
 to dye for your sake. 543-6

It is difficult to imagine why Bowers in this scene cavils
 against the aureate style. So rapid is the action, so
 woven into its fabric is the diction, that the medieval
 audience must have felt sorry for Mary Magdalene, a woman
 in a class far above them but still a fellow human being,
 fallible and weak, who fell so easily into the devil's
 toils. Bowers cannot find delight in the artistry of
 this scene, where aureate diction and style are at the
 service of a dramatization of "the problematical side of
 human experience":

The aureate style, even at its best, is undramatic
 because it is retrospective and commemorative; it
 is incapable of representing dramatic process since
 it deliberately eschews the problematical side of

human experience.¹¹⁰

What may be at bottom Bowers' problem are two other factors which destroy this scene for him--improper motivation and no clash of wills:

For in the Digby tavern scene, the visual action happens far too quickly for any adequate motivation to be developed; ... Furthermore, in the Digby tavern scene there is no dialogue, no real drama, no direct discourse where one character stands face to face with another character in any clash of will. So the characters are never fully realized.¹¹¹

Bowers forgets that the motivation for this scene was formulated by the devils-in-council two scenes back; there Satan had directed his minions:

spirits malyngny xal com to the,
Hyr to tempt in euery plase.
now alle the vj that her be
wysely to werke, hyr fawor to wynne,
to entyr hyr person be the labor of lechery,
that she at the last may com to helle. 428-33

Besides the medieval audience knew that temptation strikes without warning and with instancy.¹¹² That Bowers finds no dialogue, no real drama, no direct discourse "where one character stands face to face with another character in any clash of will", in the tavern scene is strange.

¹¹⁰Op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹¹Op. cit., pp. 29-30.

¹¹²While it is not our concern here, the suddenness of Mary Magdalene's conversion must be observed. The medieval audience well knew that both temptation and grace may come suddenly and inexplicably.

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For in an examination of this scene, one sees two people converse, that action abounds, and two wills clash: Mary questions Coryossyte's motives.

As may be expected, Christ speaks at times in an aureate style. At Lazarus' tomb He prays to God the Father to work a miracle:

Now, father, I be-seche thyn hey paternyte,
that my prayour be resowndable to thi fathyr In glory,
to opyn theyn erys to thi son In humanyte!
nat only for me, but for thi pepyll verely,
That they may be-leue, and be-take to thi mercy.
fathyr! for them I make supplycacyon.
gracyows father! gravnt me my bone!
Lazer! Lazer! com hethyr to me! 903-10

The high style becomes God the Son speaking to God the Father with its 'paternyte', 'humanyte', and 'verely'; and 'supplycacyon'. But the aureate word that gives the prayer its specific delight is the word 'resowndable'. Later, Christ speaks to the audience from the heaven scaffold, and the diction, still consciously mature, is emotionally different and varied, in fact, the emotion running through the words in the first part of the speech is different from that in the commanding part:

O! the swettnesse of prayors sent on-to me,
fro my wel-belovyd frynd with-owt waryovns!
with gostly fode relevyd xall she be.
angelles! In-to the clowdes ye do hyr havns;
ther fede with manna to hyr systynovns;
with Ioy of angylles this lett hur receyve;
Byd hur In Ioye with all hur afyawns,
for fynddes frawd xall hur non deseyve. 2004-11

To Mary Magdalene belongs the most aureate line in the

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play. In response to Luxuria's declaration of companionship, Mary, overwhelmed, declares:

your debonarius obedyouns ravysst me to trankquelyte!
 now, syth ye desyre In eche de-gree,
 to receyve yow I have grett delectacyon;
 ye be hartely welcum on-to me!
 your tong is so amyabyll devydyd with reson. 447-51

The playwright has incorporated a quality into Mary's aristocratic character in her aureate speeches which removes any stigma of stuffiness from Mary, as a comparison of the last and the following speech, a prayer for divine assistance will demonstrate:

Now, lord of lordes, to thi blyssyd name sanctificatt,
 most mekely my feyth I recummend.
 pott don the pryd of mamentes violatt!
 lord, to thi lover thi goodnesse descend;
 lett natt ther pryd to thi poste pretend,
 wher-as is rehersyd thi hye name Ihesus.
 good lord, my preor I feythfully send;
 Lord, thi rythwysnesse here dyscus! 1555-62

Mary's simplicity, her single-mindedness, shines forth here. And added to her complete and straightforward dedication as an apostless, is her humility, her relationship with God.

This examination, then, has shown that aureate diction in this play is used abundantly, is not, in the large, invented, but is used with a sureness of theatrical touch, controlled, and handled always with the skill of a craftsman.

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C. Simple Diction

The playwright uses the same careful craftsmanship in his use of simpler diction. In the play three kinds of diction apart from aureate may be distinguished: dignified or reverent, simple, and comic. An excellent example of the dignified, quiet diction is Christ's solacing speech to Mary Magdalene beside the empty sepulchre:

woman! woman! wy syest thou?
wom sekest thou? tell me this. 1061-2

In the same scene Mary Magdalene admits that she thought Christ was Simon the gardener. Christ counters this with a conceit in a poetical speech that is very simple and clear: He, indeed, is a gardener, of souls:

so I am, for-sothe, mary:
mannys hartt is my gardyn here;
ther-In I sow sedys of vertu all the yere;
the fowle wedes and wycys, I reynd vp be the rote.
whan that gardyn is watteryd with terys clere,
than spryng vertuus, and smelle full sote. 1080-5

No medieval audience could miss the implications of that speech nor has the playwright missed the opportunity to consciously couch this speech in language appropriate to Christ's action at the moment: solicitude, kindness, regard for His creatures, fallen, redeemed; Mary immediately before Him, and the audience. The mood, the action, and the diction are all one. Christ and His apostless-to-be are emphatically centre platea. The fact that Christ is

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given speeches, unadorned by aureate words, implies conscious artistic craftsmanship by the playwright; the kindly Christ is approachable by all. Is Mary, in her aureate speeches thus less approachable, or is she the apostless to majesty alone? These are conjectures, which lose weight when Mary Magdalene does use simple diction in the play:

He that from my person vij dewlles mad to fle,
 be vertu of hym alle thyng was wrowth;
 to seke thoys pepyll I woll rydy be.
 as thou hast commavnddytt, In vertv they xall be browth.
 with thi grace, good lord, In deite,
 Now to the see I wyll me hy,
 sum sheppying to asspy.
 Now spede me, lord, In eternall glory!
 now be my spede, allmyty trenite! 1386-94

The playwright underlines Syrus' natural simplicity, as he does the newly baptized King of Marcyll's, by having Syrus use simple language in contrast with the alliterative and aureate diction in his opening identifying speech. For in Syrus's death scene, Syrus, like all men in the face of death, sheds the artificial, is afraid, is aware of his pains, thinks of his closest friends; and Syrus, being religious, thinks also of his God:

A! help! help! I stond in drede,
 syknes is sett onder my syde!
 A! help! deth wyll a-quyte me my mede!
 A! gret gode! thou be my gyde;
 How I am trobyllyd both bak and syde,
 now wythly help me to my bedde.
 A! this rendyt my rybbys! I xall never goo nor ryde!

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the dent of deth is hevvar than led.
 A! lord, Lord! what xal I doo this tyde?
 A! gracyows god! have ruth on me,
 In thys word no lengar to a-byde.
 I blys yow, my chyldyrn, god mot with vs be! 265-76

The King of Marcylle exhibits his conversion, his change of thought, from pagan to Christian, by a change in diction, from bombastic to simple: even when he decides to be baptized the playwright heralds the change of heart in a change of diction as in this answer to his gravid wife, who does not wish to be left at home while he is in Jerusalem:

wyff, syn that ye woll take this wey of pryse,
 therto can I no more seyn
 now, Iesu be ower gyd, that is hye Iustyce,
 And this blyssyd womman, mary mavgleyn! 1709-12

As the shipman and boy are preparing to throw the body of the Queen of Marcylle overboard, the King intercedes in a speech that formerly might have been full of fiery bombast but is now a simple cry of the heart for pity, compassion and love:

nay, for goddes sake, do natt so!
 & ye wyll hyr In-to the se cast,
 gyntyll seres, for my love do.
 yendyr is a roch In the west:
 as ley hyr ther-on all a-bove,
 and my chylde hyr by. 1782-7

With St Peter, his simple diction is free of his former penchant for arrogance: to confirm him in his election, St Peter advises the King to visit Nazareth and Bethlehem, but the King tactfully and with reverence and obedience in

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his tone implies that after his lengthy absence the press of affairs requires his return:

now, holy father, derevorthy and dere,
myn Intent now know ye,
ittis gon full to yere,
that I cam to yow ower the se,
crystes servont and yower to be,
& the lave of hym ever to fulfyll.
now woll I hom In-to my contre.
yower pver blyssynd, gravnt vs tylle,
that, feythfully I crave.

1852-60

In the priest-altar boy scene, simple diction is the pattern. The priest in his first speech uses only one aureate word, 'solemnyte', but in the context of the simple speech is set the contrast between the seriousness of the King and the buffoonery of priest and altar boy.

now, my clerke, Hawkyn, for loue of me
Loke fast myn awter wer a-rayd;
goo ryng a bell to or thre!
lythly, chylde, it be natt delayd,
for here xall be a grett solemnyte.
loke, boy, thou do it with a brayd!

1143-8

In the main, the speech of the vassals is simple and straightforward. This is in contrast with the upper class who, in a feudal society, would be expected to speak like the upper class, wear the latest fashions, use the latest quips and vocabulary in speech. Thus during the time when the playwright is writing, late fifteenth, early sixteenth century, aureate diction and the aureate style of the early renaissance are being absorbed by the upper class of the day and this playwright artistically

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incorporates those new facets of vocabulary into this play. An example of the simple and straightforward speech of the vassals is that of the sailor who is putting out to sea:

stryke! skryke! lett fall an ankyr to grownd!
 Her is a fayer haven to se!
 connyngly In, loke that ye sownd;
 I hope good harbarow have xal wee!
 loke that we have drynke, boy thou. 1395-9

Surprisingly, Satan, the Prince of the Devils, when giving orders or making executive statements breaks away from his aureate-alliterative diction and in simple diction orders his council:

Serys, now ye be set, I xal yow say:
 syrus dydd this odyr day;
 Now mary his dowctor, that may,
 of that castel beryt the pryse. 414-7

Most of the messengers in the play speak simply. The exception is the heavenly kind, the angel. Mary had reached heaven and two angels comment, in simple reverent diction, on her arrival; the first:

now reseyye we this sowle, as reson is,
 In heven to dwelle vs a-mong. 2120-1

This sounds stilted and stiff. It lacks the verve of the priest's speech quoted above. And the second angel echoes the first:

with-owtyn end to be in blysse,
 now lett vs syng a mery song. 2122-3

On the other hand, a former heavenly angel, but still acting as a messenger, Sensuality, messenger of the King of

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the World, delivers this message to the Flesh:

Heyl, lord in lond, led with lykyng!
 Heyl, flesch in lust, fayyrest to be-hold!
 Heyl, lord and ledar of empror and kyng!
 the worthy word, be wey and wold,
 Hath sent for yow and your consell.
 satan is sembled with his howshold;
 your covnseyl to haue, most fo[r] a-weyle. 398-404

The first line is an example of alliteration without bombast but with fulsome praise. The point here, of course, is the contrast between the simplicity of this diction and the high flown diction of the other angels. Simplicity marks the diction of Tiberius's messenger as he leaves to take a message to Herod:

soueren, your arend it xall be don ful redy
 In alle the hast that I may;
 for to fullfyll your byddyng
 I woll nat spare nother be nyth nor be day. 136-9

And the same playwright who has drawn this minor character so ably varies his art to tell a similar story by Pilate's messenger, who, simple-hearted, has a sense of his vocation; he, too, is off to Herod's: but his diction is much more elevated than that of Tiberius's messenger:

My Lord, In hast yower masage to spede
 On-to that lordes of ryall renown,
 Dowth ye nat, my lord, it xall be don In-dede;
 now hens woll I fast owt of this town. 1277-80

Besides his creation of simple speeches for his angels and messengers, the playwright tailors simple diction to the use of his characters in his comic interludes. The audience having been imaginative and emotionally

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present at the harrowing of hell and the resurrection, is ready for a change from the tension. Timely relief, then, begins to arrive with the reintroduction of the King of Marcyllle, who tells his court that a religious rite will be performed in his temple. The priest and his altar boy appear and burlesque a religious service. The diction is simple throughout. The King's sincere reverence and humility counterpoint the irreverent buffoonery and fun that he and his friends are oblivious of; and the irony, obvious to the audience, adds to their enjoyment. The boldness and intellectual ascendancy of the altar boy remain after his first sally in answer to the priest's request that he array the altar and ring the bells to begin the ritual sacrifice; with tarred brush he swipes at the priest's offtime pursuit:

whatt, master, woldyst thou have thi lemman to thi
beddes syde?
thow xall a-bye tyll my servyse is sayd. 1149-50

The priest replies that he never intended this inference to be taken from his opening speech. But the boy taunts further, mentioning the priest's gluttony, his lack of sex appeal, his girth and weight:

ye have so fellyd yower bylly with growell,
that it growit grett as the dywll of hell.
on-shaply thou art to see!
whan women comme to here thi sermon,
pratyly with hem I can houkkyn,
with kyrchon and fayer maryon.
they love me better than ye,

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I dare sey and thou xulddes ryde,
 thi body is so grett and wyde,
 that never horse may thee a-byde,
 exseptt thou breke his bakk asovndyr. 1156-66

The second time the playwright applies comic relief is not too far removed from the priest's parting blessing. Mary requires transport to Marseilles and the playwright opportunely provides a ship, its captain and a saucy, malingering cabin boy; and with these two, comic relief. They come on stage with their ship, the stage direction says "with a mery song"--a happy beginning for the light contretemps that now occurs. Having made harbour, the shipman orders drinks for the crew. But the cabin boy impudently avers that he is immobilized from lack of sleep. The shipman then asks whether dinner is ready. In reply the cabin boy, like the priest's boy and Shakespeare's low comics later, does not scruple over the indelicate word:

Natt for me be of good chyer,
 thowe ye be sor hongord tyll ye rave,
 I tell yow plenly be-forn;
 for swyche a cramp on me sett is,
 I am a poynt to fare the worse;
 I ly and wryng tyll I pysse,
 And am a poyntt to be for-lorn. 1404-10

As yet the shipman does not know whether the boy is to be commiserated ortold to get to work; for he asks:

now, boy, whatt woll the this seyll? 1411

No doubt exists in the shipman's mind after the boy

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unabashedly suggests that a fair damsel would revitalize him:

Nothing butt a fayer damsell;
she shold help me, I know it well,
Ar elles I may rue the tyme that I was born. 1412-14

The shipman attacks the boy instantly; verbally first:

Be my trowth, syr boye, ye xal be sped;
I wyll hyr bryng on-to yower bed;
now xall thou lern a damsell to wed,
she wyll nat kysse the on skorn. 1415-18

The stage direction reads: "bete hym". And the results find voice in the caterwalling of the unbluffed malingerer:

A skorn, no, no, I fynd it herneest!
the dewlle of hell motte the brest,
for all my corage is now cast;
alasse! I am for-lorn! 1419-22

Here the playwright uses not only quips and situation humor but also physical violence. But the point here is that the playwright couches this scene in comic, though rough and ribald in parts, simple diction.

The dramatist of Mary Magdalene, as we have seen above, has used different forms of diction. Simple characters use simple diction, and the important, more complex characters use alliteration, aureate diction and simple language. In his scenes this craftsman creates mood by his choice of aureate or simple diction and by alliteration. As this play also indulges in comic scenes, sometimes in what is called "comic relief", the diction used in comic scenes was examined. Generally this diction is

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colloquial, and sometimes crude. This may be taken as an indication of the playwright's serious concern for aureate language. The only kind of stylized language in the comic scenes is the parodied recitation in the mocking service at the altar of Mahomet by the altar boy.

After examining the diction in Mary Magdalene we can conclude that it is not, as some critics have thought, used in a hit and miss extravagant fashion but in a highly craftsmanlike, intelligent manner.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The Digby Mary Magdalene is the work of a conscious, mature craftsman. In an age of transition in the medieval theatre this playwright constructed a medieval religious play using elements from the mystery cycles, the moralities and the miracles. Against the macrocosm of the whole sweep of God's plan for man from creation to judgment, the playwright builds his play, which is both the story of Christ's life and the life of Mary Magdalene, a person who responds to the grace Christ won for man by the Redemption. All facets of the macrocosm are not indeed incorporated into the play; but the medieval audience was able to visualize the scope of the canvas on which the playwright wrought his play. The microcycle that results indicates the author's artistic selectivity.

That the play is religious and medieval is central. Disregard of these two qualities is the cause of most of the inane criticism of the play. Not having acquainted himself with the religious doctrine that courses through this play, the critic will not be able to perceive the plot. And being unacquainted with the medieval audience's acceptance of the mixture of comic and serious in

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life, the critic will mistakenly find the devils merely hilarious. Since religion regulated medieval life for the medieval playwright and his audience, medieval religious assumptions form the fabric of the play. For example, the audience would find no difficulty in Mary's instantaneous conversion, for it is motivated by the word "mercy" in the Good Angel's admonitory speech to Mary. Without the knowledge that the grace of conversion is apt to be instantaneous, Mary's sudden change seems unmotivated, unconvincing.

Once settled on his plot, the playwright of Mary Magdalene directed the staging of the play by means of stage directions between most of the scenes, between some of the speeches, and internally in the speeches themselves. As we have seen Miss Kiner shows the efficacy and economy of this stagecraft in her representation of a performance using an oblong stage.¹¹³ Since plot rather than the development of the character, was paramount at every moment in the playwright's mind, the staging as well as the characterization must support the plot: at no time in the play is this principle ignored. Long before Shakespeare's use of the technique of alternating scenes from different strands of a plot, this principle was successfully used

¹¹³Op. cit., p. 29.

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as we have seen in the Digby Mary Magdalene. At times one may truly complain that Shakespeare has too many plots and that in this way a change of scenes does really distract from rather than contribute to the unity of the play: this never happens in Mary Magdalene, for there is only one plot, the various strands and layers of which, as it were, simultaneously pass before us on the stage.

Less spectacular but nevertheless skilful is the author's craft of varying his diction to suit the character and scene. In the large, the playwright has moulded his sources to suit his plot, but it is here in his use of language that his control, his skilful selectivity, and his sensitivity towards his characters can best be observed. Analysis of the tavern scene, where the virgin Magdalene falls, bears out these skills.

CHAPTER V

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ABSTRACT

Critics have traditionally claimed that the Digby Mary Magdalene play is a mixture of miracle, morality, and mystery elements, dramatically disunited and scrambled, deficient in characterization, impossible to perform, and its diction improper and hardly worthy of notice. In a word, the Digby Mary Magdalene had never been seriously considered as a work of dramatic craftsmanship.

This thesis attempts to show that the critics erred in their evaluations of the play, and that the play was the work of a mature craftsman who constructed a medieval religious play in which plot was paramount. Consequently, the play was carefully examined from three aspects: staging, plot and diction.

Having established the plot, which is the life of Christ mirrored in the life of Mary Magdalene, the thesis traced the intertwining of these two principals throughout the play. The plot united the miracle or saint's play elements which roughly followed the Legenda Aurea with the morality elements notably present in the tavern scene and the scenes preceding it, and united both of these elements with those of the mystery cycle which followed the New Testament or were referred to in the Old Testament. It was found that the public life of Christ, along with parts of the Old Testament present in the play, added up to at

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least the scope of a microcycle with the sweep, to the medieval audience, of a mystery cycle. In uniting the three strands the playwright constructed a play of almost epic craft.

The staging, which was found practicable, unified and clarified the plot. The study of the staging further showed that this playwright, some eighty years before Shakespeare, successfully employed the technique of switching from plot to subplot and back again as scene followed scene in rapid succession. Thus in the handling of the various strands of the story the playwright produced an effective unity of dramatic structure.

The diction was then studied in some detail, and was found to be vigorous and artistically varied. Suiting his diction to his characters and their roles in the different scenes of the play, the playwright used the aureate diction prevalent at the time and used this in combination with reverend, simple, and even slightly crude diction. The diction, in short, was found to be capable of carrying the plot, of reflecting levels of society and of indicating spiritual change.

The total analysis exhibited the care taken by a craftsman in blending his sources into a conventional, unified, medieval, religious drama. By using stage conventions readily recognizable and acceptable to his

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audience, the playwright has crafted a transitional play from its antecedents: mystery, morality, and miracle plays. Perhaps the test that best proves the craftsmanship behind the play is the pace of the action: it never drags, and after the Resurrection its tempo increases.