

Class ga

HOLY HARLOTS

Outline

- Three examples
 - Mary of Egypt
 - Pelagia the Harlot
 - Mary Magdalene
- How do these characters function? What do they represent? (*Garber essay*)

THREE EXAMPLES



Mary of Egypt

Mary of Egypt

- How and why does Mary begin her life of prostitution? Do you imagine this was a common experience?
- How and why does Mary convert from prostitution? Or does she? Is her celibate life marked by any attributes that her earlier life of prostitution shared?
- If real prostitutes rarely entered the trade because of sex addiction or a "natural" (female) inclination to sex, why do these Christian authors portray that as their motivation?
- What are women like Mary figures OF?

Pelagia the Harlot

- How and why does Pelagia convert from prostitution? Or does she? Is her celibate life marked by any attributes that her earlier life of prostitution shared?



Bishop Nonnos meets Pelagia

- What is Pelagia a figure OF? It's important, in considering your answer, to know that her story was not just popular among women, but among male Christian monks.

Mary Magdalene



Giotto di Bondone
The Life of Jesus: Noni me tangere
1304-1306
Arena Chapel
Padua

- In the gospels, the "apostle to the apostles"

Mary Magdalene



Codex Vaticanus
Gospel of John
300s CE
No chapter & verses 1-11

- In the gospels, the "apostle to the apostles"
- Because she went to the tomb to anoint Jesus, later Christians confuse her with
 - a sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50)
 - another Mary who anoints Jesus' feet (John 12:1-8)
 - the adulteress whom Jesus saves from stoning (late addition to John, now in 7:53-8:11)

Mary Magdalene



Titian
The Atoning Magdalene
1490-1576
Galleria Palatina
Palazzo Pitti, Florence

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 - the adulteress whom Jesus saves from stoning (late addition to John, now in 7:53-8:11)
- Thus she becomes the penitent prostitute *par excellence*

Mary Magdalene



Mary Magdalene



Mary of Egypt

Quentin Metsys, 1466-1530

HOW DO THESE CHARACTERS FUNCTION?

How Do These Holy Harlots & Transvestite Saints Function?

- Post persecution, these stories
 - Entertain: vivid language, exotic locales; beasts of desert replace beasts in arenas
 - Discipline: newly converted women (and men) are disciplined into asceticism against these exaggerated models
 - Reassure: that conversion is possible even for sinners
 - Redirect desire from temporal and ephemeral goals to God
 - Teach: the cross means death to this world and a different kind of life
- For monks in monasteries
 - Fantasies of male monks defeat their *own* desires by projecting them onto imagined women in their midst
 - Stories of females charged with paternity explore the mystery of God's fatherhood
