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# Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel

## Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John

Edited by
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Mohr Siebeck 2013

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament

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that as it may, the important aspect that should be noted here is that an ambiguity such as this normally has *a retarding effect* on the reading process – it slows the process down. To explain this effect, one might borrow a concept from Formalism (in particular, from Victor Shklovsky[29]), namely that of "defamiliarization." This refers to a situation where what has become automatic through habitual usage is made strange, becomes unfamiliar and is suddenly perceived differently. Applied to John 19:25: The ambiguity in the text may lead to the normal reading process being disrupted, thus causing the duration and difficulty of the perception to be increased. Why is it important to take note of this? Because a slowing down in the reading process will focus the attention of the reader more intensely on the content – in this instance, on the presence of a certain group of women by the cross and what they are doing there. Two, three or four women by the cross? And what are they doing there? Perhaps questions such as these might linger on in the mind of the "normal" reader for much longer than many Johannine scholars would suspect …

[29] For a good overview of Formalism and Shklovsky's idea of "defamiliarization," cf. W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 138–44.

# Mary Magdalene: Beginning at the End

*Jaime Clark-Soles*

Mary Magdalene never fails to enthrall.[1] She appears in crucial roles in the Gospel of John, but only at the end and then suddenly. In John, Mary Magdalene is standing right at the foot of the cross and participates in the birth (or, perhaps more accurately, "creation"[2]) of the Johannine church as Jesus gifts his Mother and Beloved Disciple with one another. To be part of Johannine community is to be part of a family, to be home (cf. 1:11–13; 14:23).

> Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his Mother, and his Mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.[3] When Jesus saw his Mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his Mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (John 19:25–27).

As if that were not a powerful enough scene, Mary Magdalene (MM) becomes the first person to encounter the risen Lord, by herself, and the first to announce the resurrection in Christian history. It is *she* who proclaims the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples. Had she appeared only in 19:25, the reader might notice her with momentary curiosity or a cursory gesture toward apparent historical accuracy (since she appears in each of the Gospel accounts at the crucifixion and tomb); but almost as soon as she enters the narrative in John, she commandeers it.

In the following essay, I offer a narratological study of MM drawing upon the practical guidelines provided by Tolmie.[4] Tolmie defines the implied author "in terms of the overall textual strategy" (including narrator, narratee, focalization, events, time, setting and character).[5] This strategy is revealed to the readers verse by verse as they experience the narrative.

[1] Mary Magdalene is a pop culture icon, appearing in books (such as Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and Jane Schaberg with Melanie Johnson-Debaufre's *Mary Magdalene Understood*), movies (such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* or *Jesus of Montreal*), paintings and music. She even appeared in an off-Broadway musical, *The Magdalene*, which debuted in 2011.

[2] See Deborah Sawyer, "John 19:34: From Crucifixion to Birth, or Creation?," in *A Feminist Companion to John, Volume II* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 130–39.

[3] For a brief treatment that distinguishes all of the Marys and, in particular, Mary Magdalene, see Jaime Clark-Soles, *Engaging the Word: The New Testament and the Christian Believer* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 35–42.

[4] D. Francois Tolmie, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999).



## Who is She? A Brief Background on Mary Magdalene

Before beginning the detailed literary analysis, however, it is important to clarify Mary Magdalene as a biblical character and a figure in history.[6] After all, she is often confused with other characters, notably the other Marys in the Gospels, and especially Mary of Bethany. Early in the history of interpretation, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene became conflated and associated with the anointing woman of the Four Gospels. Mary of Bethany has good reason to be associated with the anointing woman, as she is actually recounted in John 12:1–8 as anointing Jesus. The anointing woman in Matt 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9 is unnamed. The woman described as a sinner in Luke 7:36–50 who anoints Jesus also lacks a name and performs this act far earlier in Jesus' ministry (the other anointings take place shortly before the crucifixion).

Despite the presence of distinct geographic markers in their names (Bethany and Magdalene), the two Marys become one, and unite with the anointing woman/women. This harmonization comes to a climax in a sermon given by Pope Gregory the Great in 591 when he proclaims, "She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary [of Bethany], we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark."[7] Unfortunately, inattentive exegesis has practically become doctrine in this case.

Mary Magdalene herself only appears in the Gospels as a disciple (Luke 8:2), at the foot of the cross (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25), and at the tomb (Matt 27:61, 28:1–10; Mark 15:47–16:11; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–18). The only details provided about her life in the New Testament include her association with Magdala, that Jesus cast seven demons from her, and that she may have been a woman of means (implied in her bringing costly spices to the tomb in Mark). She does appear in extra-biblical works, notably as the legend-

[5] Tolmie, *Narratology*, 115.

[6] For further information on Mary Magdalene, see Jane Schaberg and Melanie Johnson DeBaufre, *Mary Magdalene Understood* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Judith Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Die Darstellung von Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und die Mutter Jesu im Kontext anderer frühchristlicher Traditionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Robin Griffin-Jones, *Beloved Disciple: The Misunderstood Legacy of Mary Magdalene, the Woman Closest to Jesus* (New York: Harper One, 2008); Bruce Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2005); Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[7] For further discussion about these points, see Clark-Soles, *Engaging*, 42; and Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel, *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in the Da Vinci Code* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 82.

ary author of the Gospel of Mary. She is also mentioned in vss. 32 and 55 of the Gospel of Philip, first as Jesus' lover and then as the one Jesus loved most and kissed often. Whether this love included a sexual relationship, however, is at the very least ambiguous.

Mary, particularly the conflated Mary Magdalene/Bethany also shows up in legend as somewhat of a mystic who relocated to the South of France following the death of Jesus. These legends seem to have originated in the Middle Ages, however, and thus cannot claim to be historical. Mary of Bethany/Magdala can count a number of women followers, however, particularly during the Middle Ages.[8]

## Narrator and Narratee

The implied author uses a reliable, extradiegetic (i. e., primary level narration) and heterodiegetic (i. e., not one of the characters in the story) narrator who narrates the story by means of ulterior narration (i. e., the story is narrated after the events have occurred). The narrator is overtly perceptible (especially in places such as 20:16 when translating "Rabbouni" or in 20:2 where the other disciple is further identified as "the one whom Jesus loved."). At times the implied author employs intradiegetic (i. e., embedded) narrators (Mary, angels, Jesus) and narratees (the disciples, Mary, Jesus).

The extradiegetic narrator's patterns are important. First, he compares and contrasts characters in order to highlight what is valuable and true theologically. Here MM is contrasted with the disciples who are found wanting in terms of abiding, comprehending discipleship. Second, the narrator uses dialogue to validate what is narrated here and elsewhere (e. g., that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father from whom he came and with whom he abides in intimate relationship). Third, the dialogue is energetic and moves the story at a rapid pace as the characters speak in short sentences (with the exception of the important information Jesus conveys in 20:17), and quickly go back and forth. Furthermore, there is redundancy in the speeches – both Jesus and the angels ask Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

In 20:8–9, the narrator is used to provide the central theological kernel that drives the whole narrative of 20:1–18, namely that Jesus must rise from the dead as indicated by scripture. This clearly relates to 2:22: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." Throughout the Fourth Gospel (FG), the reader is taught that coming, seeing, believing and

[8] Diane E. Peters, "The Legends of St. Mary of Bethany and their Dissemination in the Later Middle Ages," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 48 (1994): 154–57.



understanding scripture's testimony to the identity of Jesus are key traits of good discipleship. Here, Peter and the other disciple are presented positively insofar as they come and see. Then the reader learns that the other disciple "believes." But what, exactly, does he believe? Often it is assumed that he believes the central message of the narrative, namely, that Jesus has risen from the dead. But this cannot be accurate since the narrator immediately and starkly informs the reader that they did *not* understand. Therefore, the only thing that the "other disciple" believes at this point is MM's testimony that the tomb was empty.

The narrator then turns to the first character in the narrative who comes, sees the empty tomb, encounters the resurrected Son of God (20:17) and Lord (both titles which the implied author depends and insists upon in conveying his Christology) and testifies to his resurrection.

Attending to the function of intradiegetic narration also displays the importance of Mary's voice. The disciples never speak. The supernatural characters, Jesus and the angels, speak but Mary is the only human character to speak. She speaks far more than the angels (they get only three words in the NA27 text). Strikingly, she speaks more words than Jesus himself (MM speaks 43 words; Jesus speaks 38). Mary, as an intradiegetic narrator, has a recurring concern: much of her speech is about where Jesus has been laid and by whom, thereby highlighting the fact and the meaning of the empty tomb.

Furthermore, using intradiegetic narration is a vivid means for the implied author to convey the theological claims about the identity of Jesus and his intimate relationship with his followers. The technique is more immediate than extradiegetic narration and aligns with the implied author's admission that the aim is to persuade at the personal level: "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

## Time

The events in 20:1–18 are mostly narrated in the order in which they occurred but there are two important exceptions. At v. 9 we find a prolepsis that indicates a primary theological point of the implied author: "for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead." Second, there is an embedded analepsis at the other locus of theological import in the narrative, namely v. 18 where Mary proclaims the risen Lord and "told them that he had said these things to her" (presumably including at least the content narrated in v. 17). Who the exact recipients of her testimony are remains unclear.

The events in 20:1–18 appear to happen in a very brief period of time. The narrator indicates in 20:1 that the events occurred "early on the first day of the

week [i. e., Sunday], while it was still dark" and then does not provide another time indicator until 20:19 where the reader learns that the next set of events happens that same [Sunday] evening. Regarding duration, note that the narrative about MM takes up more narrative space than both of the appearances to the male disciples combined.

## Setting

The narrator informs the reader at 19:42 that it was the "Jewish day of Preparation;" the larger context is Passover (19:14). Placing Jesus' words and deeds in the context of Jewish feasts is, of course, a typical strategy of the implied author and contributes to the Christology of the Gospel. Jesus is the Lamb sent by God who takes away the sin of the world.

Scenically, based on 19:41 the reader knows that at 20:1 MM is in a garden, the garden of all gardens, as it turns out. At 20:15 the reader learns that she supposed Jesus to be *the* gardener (ὁ κηπουρός). The narrator notes that it is the *first* day, taking the reader back to the very beginning of creation (cf. John 1:1–5), the very *first* day with the creator and a garden and two human beings who are trying to work out personhood, and bodies, and gender and sex and earthliness/fallenness/grief/despair (descent?) and godliness/redemption/peace/joy (ascent?). Genesis allusions abound.[9] Fulfillment comes here, in the garden, and then *life* starts here – eternal life – in the garden. Creation has come to completion.

## Focalization

Focalization answers the question: "Through whose eyes do we view the events that are being narrated to us?"[10] Tolmie uses the analogy of a movie camera (the locus of perception) and the way it causes the reader to view the various scenes. In this passage, the focalization is mostly external such that the narrated events are presented "as if they are perceived ('viewed') by an onlooker who does not play any role in the story himself/herself."[11] But there are times when the camera zooms in so closely that the readers feel that they are looking

[9] For Genesis allusions, see Ruben Zimmermann, "Symbolic Communication Between John and His Reader: The Garden Symbolism in John 19–20," in *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Futures of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. Tom Thatcher and Stephen D. Moore; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 221–35. See also Steven Hunt's essay on the Roman soldiers at the arrest of Jesus in this volume.

[10] Tolmie, *Narratology*, 32.

[11] Tolmie, *Narratology*, 32.



through the eyes of one of the characters through internal focalization, especially because the narrator repeatedly tells the reader what the characters "saw" (1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18; four different verbs are used: βλέπω, παρακύπτω, θεωρέω, and ὁράω). Almost every time that verbs for seeing appear, the object is either the empty tomb and the items in it or the risen Jesus. The disciples see only the empty-tomb paraphernalia (5, 6, 8); Mary sees much more: the empty tomb (1, 11), angels (12), and the risen Lord Jesus (14, 18). She sees because she abides (μένω). μένω occurs forty times in the Fourth Gospel (cf. three times in Matt.; twice in Mark; six times in Luke). Abiding is a signature mark of true discipleship in the Fourth Gospel and those who do so receive immense benefits (cf. 6:56–58; 15:4–7). MM is in no less pain than the disciples, but she abides and is richly rewarded for it.

The "camera" first shoots the empty tomb. Then it follows MM to the place where the disciples are gathered, wherever that may be. It then follows Peter and "the other disciple" back to the tomb. Though not explicitly narrated, it is clear that MM returns as well because she is there in v. 11. The reader then sees split screens: on one side the reader sees the disciples, again, shockingly self-absorbed (ἀπῆλθον οὖν πάλιν πρὸς αὐτοὺς, 20:10); on the other the reader sees Mary "weeping outside the tomb." She stays until v. 18. So, for the vast majority of the narrative time Mary stays at the tomb; the disciples run over momentarily and have no interest in remaining (they do not weep, wonder where the body is, etc.). She leaves the tomb only to speak to the disciples (vss. 2 and 18) who, one would think, would be at the tomb. Good things come to those who wait.

The focalized objects (i. e., the characters) include MM, the disciples, the angels, and Jesus. Notice that the camera focuses on MM in 10 of the 18 verses. The only focalized objects who receive internal focalization (the portrayal of the inner thoughts, feelings and knowledge of the characters)[12] are the disciples and Mary. At first neither they nor she have the requisite knowledge that matters so much to the narrator in v. 9. By the end of this passage, however, MM not only acquires this life-giving knowledge, but also immediately shares it (a trait highly valued by the narrator). Seasoned readers of the Fourth Gospel know that the narrator regularly uses intercharacterization technique; that is, the narrator develops characters by juxtaposing them one with another. This will be addressed further in what follows.

[12] Tolmie, *Narratology*, 33.

## Detailed Analysis

A full discussion of the characterization of MM requires even more attention to the details of the narrative as it unfolds in linear fashion.

### *Jesus Gets Laid: 19:41–42*

After MM's first appearance, Jesus goes on to die and has his body penetrated by violent men; finally, he is laid by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (ἔθηκαν τὸν Ἰησοῦν; 19:42) on "the Jewish day of Preparation." Concern for Jesus' laid body compels MM who appears in the very next verse, John 20:1.

### *Magdalene Takes Center Stage: Vss. 1–2*

V. 1: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb."

Already the reader of the FG experiences shockwaves of various sorts and numerous questions arise. To begin, the first person to arrive on the scene, and early, is a character who was only introduced into the narrative as a whole a mere thirteen verses earlier. Surely the reader should expect the Beloved Disciple to appear first, or Jesus' Mother, or really *any* other character who appeared far earlier in the narrative.

Second, MM "comes" (ἔρχομαι) and "sees" (βλέπω). "Come and see" is a Johannine catchphrase used by characters who express the values and paradigmatic behavior championed by the narrator (cf. 1:46; 4:29). This should not be surprising since Jesus himself is identified as the one always "*coming* into the world" (1:9) and *coming* to his followers (14:23, 28) and revealing himself to them. MM is proactive, a trait valued by the author.

### *Intercharacterization*

Third, the language of light and darkness indicates that MM is being juxtaposed to other characters in the Gospel. Recall that the narrator leads the reader forward sentence by sentence, character by character. By the time that the implied readers get to Mary they have met (and judged) numerous characters. "Intertextuality" is a prominent narrative strategy of the FG and is on vivid display with the "intercharacterization" that occurs often. That is, while characters can be understood in part individually, they are often only fully perceived by comparison with and contrast to other characters. Since this is a chief component of the characterization of Mary, it deserves special attention.

Characters whom the narrator regards most highly are related to light; those to be suspected or rejected are related to darkness. The narrator associates some would-be disciples with darkness. Nicodemus arrives at night not only in his first appearance (3:2) but also his last (19:39). The narrator explicitly indicates that Judas' betrayal occurred at night (13:30).



Mary comes at the start of day, πρωΐ. The only other occurrence of this word in the FG appears in 18:28: "Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning." The males with power, be it the religious establishment or the Roman Empire, deal with Jesus πρωΐ and decide against him unto death. MM, the next and only other person to act πρωΐ, decides for him unto life.

Furthermore, MM is being played off of the obviously-missing disciples, here Peter and the Beloved Disciple. She is the first one who takes the Jesus affair so seriously that she races to the tomb, and she is the first to grasp the full meaning of the resurrection. This is consistent with the narrator's noteworthy (if thoroughly offensive for his/her own time) insistence that the foundations of the kerygma rest in large part upon female characters.[13] As duly noted elsewhere, this pattern appears throughout the Gospel and is part of its situational irony (so that God works in mysterious ways that entail women as chief agents, witnesses, apostles, catalysts, and evangelists). The same pattern of female trust, insight, and proclamation inheres in the story of John 2, where the disciples are at the wedding but it is Jesus' Mother who proactively, if inchoately, indicates an understanding of Jesus' unique power and destiny. In ch. 4, the Samaritan woman, in direct contrast to Nicodemus' failed attempt to fully encounter Jesus, experiences a theophany (4:26) and evangelizes a city; she is boldly contrasted with the disciples who adopt a reluctant stance whereby they sit on a stump distracted by many ponderous thoughts about why Jesus is speaking with a woman and what kind of food Jesus might be hoarding (4:33). The compassionate reader feels rather awful for the disciples at this point, so dazzlingly is the Samaritan woman painted.[14]

MM is positively connected to Martha, Mary, and Jesus as they appear in chapter 11. Jesus' interactions with Mary and Martha precipitate one of his great revelatory statements: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (11:25). Lazarus never says a word, but Jesus' interaction with the women eventuates in a testimony and an ejaculatory, kerygmatic proclamation by Martha: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (11:27).

[13] For further discussion, see Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

[14] Note that the Samaritan woman interacts with Jesus at the height of daylight, noon. Far from the tired, salacious interpretations that indicate she must come at noon because she is an alienated whore (none of which is substantiated by the text), the narrator depicts her as an elevated, perfect match for Jesus.

Recall that here Martha clearly conveys the conviction expressed by the implied author at 1:9: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

Furthermore, the fact that MM is a "Mary" who "weeps" outside a "tomb" cannot be lost on the reader of John 11 any more than can the mention of the stone that holds the dead Lazarus (11:38) and the one that held the dead Jesus (20:1). Mary of Bethany and Jesus both weep[15] appropriately for the loss of a loved one. Lazarus' restoration foreshadows weeping turned to joy later within the narrative. Again, both Mary of Bethany and Jesus are certainly positive figures, so the reader should view MM's weeping as entirely positive in this setting as it ties her to heroes of the narrative.

V. 2: "So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'"

MM sees that the stone is gone in 20:1. The text does not say that she bothered to inspect further, but it assumes this fact when she indicates knowledge that the tomb is in fact empty by her statement: "they have taken him from the tomb." MM energetically hies[16] to two particular disciples, Simon Peter and the "other disciple whom Jesus loved" and thereby catalyzes the subsequent stages of the resurrection narrative. The narrator then turns to Peter and the Beloved Disciple for a short while (20:3–10). But the fact that the story returns to MM after eight verses cues the reader to understand that MM provides the framework of the story; it focuses on her rather than on them. They are a foil, just as the disciples are for the Samaritan woman in chapter 4. Same technique, different chapter. Since this essay is limited to MM, it cannot address the BD and Peter at length. In brief, Peter and the BD arrive, glance around, gather some initial information and then go back to "doing their own thing." The NRSV translation is problematic here. It translates 20:10 as: "Then the disciples returned to their homes," but neither the word οἶκος nor οἰκία appears here; rather, the phrase is: ἀπῆλθον οὖν πάλιν πρὸς αὐτοὺς οἱ μαθηταί. The disciples just turn inward and go back to their own way of life, much like they do after the stunning appearances of the resurrected Jesus after which they just go back to fishing and being absorbed by their own small interests (to such a degree that Jesus has to ask Peter whether he loves his fishing stuff more than Jesus in 21:15).

[15] Too much is usually made of the fact that a different verb is used for Jesus' weeping, but John is known for using a variety of words synonymously (see: βλέπω/ὁράω/θεωρέω; ἀγαπάω/φιλέω).

[16] The narrator highlights MM's intensity by doubling the verbs of action (τρέχω and ἔρχομαι). Furthermore, the use of the historic present adds to the dramatic excitement.



*Mary's Angelophany: Vss. 11–13*

But not so MM. They leave; she stays (μένω; cf. with Andrew and the other disciple in 1:39).[17] As she cries, she bends over to peer into the tomb; the phrase overtly calls us to compare her to Peter and the Beloved Disciple since the same verb is used for bending over (παρακύπτω; used only in 20:5 and 11). When *she* leans into the tomb, the same one that the now-revered disciples glance at, she has the supernatural, existential, holy, eschatological experience of a lifetime: she sees (θεωρέω) not one (as in Matthew 28:5) but two angels (ἄγγελος; in Mark 16:5, it is one young man; in Luke 24:4, two men) sitting there (καθέζομαι). This language is not accidental and depends upon intertextuality for the full impact of its meaning. Angels and the revelation of Jesus' identity cohere in John (cf. 1:51 and 12:29). Furthermore, the only other sitting that occurs in John is done by Jesus himself (4:6, presumably in direct imitation of Jacob at the well) and by Mary who sits while Martha runs off to meet Jesus (11:20). Those who sit tight (in an active, proclamatory, emotional fashion) apparently have a reasonable chance of encountering Jesus in a transformative way.

In v. 13, the angels in white appear. The reader should note that the word white (λευκός) appears elsewhere only, not surprisingly, in the story of the Samaritan woman, where Jesus declares that the fields are white for harvest (4:35); once again, the NRSV kills the moment, and, more importantly, the connection, by translating "white for harvest" as "ripe for harvest." The Samaritan woman is the first pre-resurrection evangelist in the narrative and MM is the first post-resurrection evangelist.

These angels in white ask MM why she is crying, at which point she almost reiterates what she said in v. 2 except that, this time, it becomes truly personal (and that is surely the point):

v. 2: "They have taken *the* Lord out of the tomb, and *we* do not know where they have laid him."
v. 13: "They have taken away *my* Lord, and *I* do not know where they have laid him."

*The Turning Point: Mary's Christophany (vss. 14–17)*

In v. 14 MM turns (στρέφω) and sees (θεωρέω), really *sees* Jesus in the Johannine sense of the word. Only when she can articulate her pain, her need, her hope in the most personal, vulnerable, honest sense does she receive a Christophany. As long as she speaks in the safe terms of "we," she can be among the cohort of people who serve as catalysts for the faith of others; but it is only

[17] That the contrast is intentional is indicated by the use of δέ at the beginning of the verse.

when she finds the courage and audacity to speak in terms of herself, "my" Lord and what "I" do and do not know, that she becomes a personality rather than a type. And what a personality! How many people have gone from a cipher, a type, a mere representative of this or that to a "person" in, say, five verses? In v. 13, we see MM express her fear, her despair, her finitude, her decenteredness, and not-yet-knowing. But v. 14 signals a U-turn (ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω) on her part. She has remained. She has wept. She has confessed that she does not have the necessary knowledge yet to be at peace. And this persistence, depth, humility, insistence, and would-be-despair keeps her in the game. It has to be called a "game" of sorts since Jesus does toy with her somewhat in v. 15. Maybe it is for her own good or maybe he is just flexing his post-resurrection muscle, or maybe it is both. Whatever the case, in v. 15 Jesus says the same thing the angels in white said (here one is clear that the angels are dressed in white, but what is Jesus wearing? Not his ὀθόνιον or σουδάριον, obviously): "Woman, why are you crying?" But then he proceeds to ask a very Johannine-Jesus question: "Whom do you seek?" In the Fourth Gospel, one's character is largely determined by whom or what one seeks (ζητέω; cf. 1:38; 7:1, etc.).

Mary's embryonic recognition begins with her perceiving Jesus to be the gardener. Not *a* gardener, but rather *the* (ὁ) gardener. Immediately the reader is transported back to the Garden of Eden, back to Genesis, where, in the beginning, God created (cf. John 1:1–5). A veritable pyrotechnic display of Johannine intertextual allusions and Old Testament allusions explodes onto the reader's scene. His initial question to her reminds the reader not only of the angels above but also of his conversation with his mother (who is never called Mary in John, for whatever reason) in the context of a wedding: "And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come'" (2:4). He questions her and immediately makes an important theological and narratival statement about his "hour" (ὥρα). The same pattern inheres in 20:15; Jesus addresses MM as "woman" and makes a theological statement via a question about seeking (ζητέω), a favorite Johannine word. Clearly, Jesus is both seeker and the one who should be sought, according to the Fourth Gospel.

Furthermore, the garden scene reminds the reader of ch. 4 where Jesus interacts with a woman at a well, an OT site of betrothal. The scene in ch. 4 is laced with the notions of Jesus as bridegroom that arose in ch. 2. Here, Jesus seeks out Mary, who is longing for his body. The encounter achieves climax and both Jesus and Mary find satisfaction in the Garden. Creation has been restored, ecstasy has replaced agony. Where Adam and Eve experience the disintegration of intimacy, Jesus and MM exhibit reconciliation in the garden.

In v. 16, Jesus calls Mary by name (as Adam does of Eve and as Jesus does of his sheep in ch. 10) and, whereas Lazarus reacts to Jesus' voice by "coming out" (11:44), Mary responds to his voice by "coming to." She recognizes her Rabbi, her shepherd who knows his sheep and calls them by name (10:1–16). This Gospel iterates intimacy and is a remarkably tactual text (1:18; 9:6; 13:23; 20:27).[18] The text does not specifically narrate the moment that Mary begins touching Jesus, but it is clear that a) Jesus assumes that it would be natural for her to touch his body (which she has been aiming to do all through the passage – she is after his body, the concrete Jesus she can touch and know and experience as real) and b) that she is *already* touching him.[19] He asks her to stop touching him not because he is ascetic, puritanical, or aloof, but because the story needs to move forward so that he can ascend to the Father who initially sent him. From the start, the reader understands that Jesus' return to the Father, like all of his words and deeds, is finally inevitable. Jesus has come in accordance with the will of God and he marches through the Gospel accomplishing that will, always on cue. For instance, in ch. 12 he never requests a different fate (i. e., asking of the cup to pass from him as does the Synoptic Jesus); rather, he insists that he came patently for this fate (cf. 12:27, 32). Likewise, on the cross he does not express any sense of God-forsakenness; rather, he announces that he has completed the work the Father gave him (19:30: "It is finished"). No one and nothing can throw Jesus of course. He is the one who, after all, lays down his life of his own accord in order to take it up again (10:17–18). He is a motivated man with a compelling mission, always directing this God-drama and nothing and no one can impede him, not even Mary.

Jesus directs Mary as if he is directing a play whose plot must drive forward so that the narrative's goal as expressed by 20:31 might be accomplished. Jesus assuages her fears that their relationship is dying but indicates that it will be conducted in a new mode. None of this can be accomplished, however, unless she and Jesus play their parts to keep events moving. So, she must go to Jesus' brothers (and sisters)[20] and report his words: "'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (20:17). Mary, therefore, is charged with announcing what the narrative has insisted upon all along: that God, Jesus, and Jesus' followers are intimately, inseparably related (14:1–23; 17:20–24). The copious use of intimate, familial language throughout the Gos-

[18] See Teresa Swan, "Re-membering the Body of Jesus," in *Problems in Translating Texts About Jesus: Proceedings from the International Society of Biblical Literature, 2008* (ed. Mishael Caspi and John T. Greene; Lewiston, N. Y.: Mellen Press, 2011), 19–41.

[19] For a review of the various interpretive possibilities related to this vexatious verse across the centuries, see Harold W. Attridge, "'Don't Be Touching Me': Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene," in *A Feminist Companion to John, Volume II* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 140–66.

[20] I disagree with the NRSV which here translates ἀδελφοί only as brothers instead of its usual custom of "brothers and sisters." It must assume that only the BD and Peter are the recipients of this news but I see no reason that this proclamation is not to be made to the larger community of disciples (including Jesus' Mother).

pel is striking – no model of intimate human relationships is omitted: parent/child, siblings, those partnered in marriage, friends. Apparently Jesus was serious about there being no distinction between the relationship he shares with God and which his followers share with God after his resurrection. Jesus even refers to the Father here as "my God." It is no accident, of course, that Thomas will, in just a few verses, call Jesus himself "my God" since the narrator indicates by means of 1:1 that this connection should be made if the narrative unfolds persuasively.

### *Jesus' Angel – Mary Magdalene's Big Announcement: V. 18*

Without hesitation or question, MM immediately goes and announces (ἀγγέλλω) to the disciples (here called μαθηταί, not ἀδελφοί): "I have seen the Lord." As noted earlier, seeing is a crucial theme in John as is recognizing Jesus as Lord. She is the first Christian preacher insofar as she proclaims not only her own personal experience of the resurrected Christ but transmits "these things he had spoken to her" (presumably the words from v. 17 but maybe the whole dialogue).

## Conclusion: Magdalene – What a Character

A careful investigation into the techniques used to characterize MM in the Fourth Gospel reveals that not only is she a major character (despite her late arrival in the narrative), but also a positively paradigmatic one. The extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator does not simply describe MM straightforwardly. Rather, her character is revealed through intercharacterization; her dialogue with various characters; time; setting; and focalization. In addition, irony, gender dynamics, and intertextuality shape the narrative. By such means, the reader recognizes Mary as one who exhibits attributes that are presented as desirable throughout the narrative. She is a proactive character who seeks Jesus. She is obedient to the will of Jesus, and, therefore, God. Her grief is turned to joy at the coming of the risen Lord after he is lifted up. She is one of Jesus' sheep whom he calls by name. She abides and, as a result, is rewarded with an angelophany and Christophany. She is the first character to see and proclaim the risen Christ; therefore, Sandra Schneiders is quite correct in naming her "the apostle of the apostles."[21] Others might call her an evangelist. She is depicted finally as one who is born from above, i. e., not "by means of the will of a husband, but of God" (1:12–13), sharing the same Father as Jesus (cf.

[21] *Contra* Cornelis Bennema who calls Schneiders' observation an "overstatement" without justifying his criticism or providing an exegetical rebuttal (idem, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009], 200, fn. 26).



20:17). Note that the narrator never comments on MM's age, appearance, or social standing.

My summary might imply that I take MM only to be a "representative" figure who simply exemplifies this or that trait. While this may be true of some characters in the Fourth Gospel, such an approach is probably too flat for this rich character who exudes personality and complexity.[22] A less sterile summary than above may psychologize a bit more in accord with clues from the text. Mary moves from faithfulness to belief in the resurrected Lord. Unlike any other character, her commitment brings her to the tomb early in the morning. Her boldness and deep connectedness to Jesus propel her to the tomb. Once there, she confronts the empty tomb and, in paradigmatic Johannine fashion, she relates her experience to the wider community. Like the woman of John 4, she proactively involves others in the seeking after truth, the seeking after Jesus. Her hunger, her persistence, and her longing plant her squarely at the last known place her Jesus was laid. Despite some belief in the eschatological resurrection, she feels the gaping hole left by death and lack of physical presence foreshadowed in ch. 14–17. This is reminiscent of the loss Jesus felt with the death of Lazarus which also caused anguish and weeping – despite an eschatological vantage point. Like Jesus, she weeps. Her grief, however, is immediately tended to by God in the form of an angelophany and Christophany. She first calls Jesus "Teacher," as Nicodemus does. The reader knows that this is an inadequate confession and within two verses the narrator has her call Jesus "Lord" and proclaim him risen, in accordance with the scriptures.

Whatever taxonomy or viewpoint one employs, MM must be interpreted as a "full-fledged character" (to use Berlin's system): she is "complex, manifesting a multitude of traits, and appearing" as a "real" person.[23] She is a personality, with the complicated, conflicting thoughts, emotions and actions that being a person entails.[24]

[22] Classicist Christopher Gill presents two aspects of characterization in ancient tragedy: what he calls the "character-viewpoint," on the one hand, which tends toward the moralistic and representational, and the "personality-viewpoint" on the other, which is more nuanced and complex. Christopher Gill, "The Question of Character and Personality in Greek Tragedy," *Poetics Today* 2 (1986): 251–73. See also Fred W. Burnett, "Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 3–28. See also Jaime Clark-Soles, "Re(constructing) History: Characters who Count: The Case of Nicodemus," in *The Gospel of John and the Jesus of History: Engaging with C. H. Dodd on the Fourth Gospel* (ed. Tom Thatcher and Catrin Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

[23] Tolmie, *Narratology*, 55.

[24] Though attention to characterization in the Fourth Gospel has increased since Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, I find it surprising that Mary Magdalene is not treated more thoroughly. Sandra M. Schneiders' *Written That You May Believe* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 211–23, is quite helpful as is Conway's aforementioned work. One might expect her to make a more powerful appearance in Craig Koester's seminal work, *Symbolism in the*

MM is a crucial part of the Johannine theological, ecclesiological web. Through a variety of narrative strategies, then, the narrator uses the narrative to create a personality to be encountered, not a morality lesson to be swallowed with some verbal castor oil. The Fourth Gospel is no *Pilgrim's Progress* when it comes to drawing characters.

I state this so emphatically because the author of the Fourth Gospel, not to mention MM, has been done a disservice through centuries of biblical interpretation insofar as the Gospel's characters have generally been viewed too flatly. Furthermore, the robust, rich, brilliant character that he or she has created in MM has often been tarnished and belittled by interpretations that rob her of her true character. Such interpretations are not supported by the Johannine text (and probably not the Synoptics either).

Even a Johannine scholar as astute and careful as Cornelis Bennema falls into the trap. Though he labels MM a "personality" (using a range of type, personality, and individuality) and notes that "Many scholars assess Mary negatively, but this is unwarranted,"[25] he immediately proceeds to perpetuate the problem. He calls her "dull" and her quest "earthly." Though on p. 201 he lists her as "obedient," she does not achieve his "obedient response" category on p. 206 (though both Lazarus and the invalid at the pool do). Also, he does not include her in his "open/public confession" type of response, though the man born blind, Martha, Thomas, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael and others do. How is her confession less public or open? He is content, however, to put her in the "thinking 'from below'" category with Nicodemus. Such a move is flawed, exegetically speaking.

MM first testifies that the resurrected Jesus Christ is a central fact of human history, even cosmic history. In so doing, she herself becomes a central fact of that history as well. What a character! What a personality!

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Fourth Gospel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). In chapter two, "Symbolic and Representative Figures," each of the following characters gets a separate named section: Jesus; Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman; The Royal Official and the Invalid; The Crowds; The Man Born Blind and Martha, Mary, and Lazarus; and Jesus' Disciples. She appears briefly in his discussion of Jesus' Disciples on pp. 69–70. She appears in the "Notably Present Characters: Women" in Jo-Ann A. Brant's ovular work, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 208–20.

[25] Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 200.

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