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Serena Laiena

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Article abstract

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Abstract: Between 1610 and 1652, the professional actor and playwright Giovan Battista Andreini (1576–1654) published six works on the figure of Mary Magdalene. This essay proposes a reading of this corpus of works as a singular attempt by a professional actor to recast his own image by actively engaging with Counter-Reformation thought. At the same time, it deconstructs Andreini's patent compliance with Tridentine ideals and reveals that a subtle criticism, expediently hidden by the author, lies at the core of these works. In this corpus, Andreini points out the paradox inherent to the oxymoronic perception of professional performers in early modern Italy, especially actresses, who were considered diabolic by some, divine by others. He therefore censures the relativity in assessing their morality.

Between 1610 and 1652, the professional actor and playwright Giovan Battista Andreini (1576–1654) published six works on the figure of Mary Magdalene. The first, published in Venice in 1610, was a sacred poem, *La Maddalena* (henceforth *LM*a). The second, published in 1617 in Mantua, was a religious play, *La Maddalena. Sacra rappresentazione* (henceforth *LM*b). In 1628, a new version of the 1610 poem, *La Maddalena. Composizione sacra* (henceforth *LM*c), was published in Prague during Andreini's *tournée* at the court of the Emperor Ferdinand II, and in 1629, another version of the 1617 play, *La Maddalena. Composizione rappresentativa* (henceforth *LM*d), was published in Vienna. In 1643, in Paris, Andreini published the poem *Le lagrime. Divoto componimento a contemplazione della vita della penitente e piangente della gran Protettrice della Francia Maria Maddalena* (henceforth *LM*e). Finally, in 1652, in Milan, two years

before his death, he published the play *La Maddalena lasciva e penitente. Azzione drammatica e divota* (henceforth *LM*f).[1]

The figure of Mary Magdalene enjoyed a special literary and artistic fortune in early modern Italy in the wake of the post-Tridentine revival of the cult of the saints.[2] Yet, the recurrence of this character as protagonist of a corpus of writings by a professional actor appears surprising. Performers were considered "ambassadors of the devil" by many, especially men of the Church, in Counter-Reformation Italy.[3] They were perceived to be the nemesis of the ideals promoted by the Council of Trent.

This essay shows that the choice of this subject by Andreini was part of a calculated strategy. It places Andreini's resolution in the frame of the historical and cultural context of post-Tridentine Italy and reveals these works to be a singular attempt by a professional actor to recast his own image by actively engaging with Catholic thought. Andreini's compliance with Tridentine ideals will emerge as an endeavour to counter the alleged otherness of professional performers. At the same time, this essay points out the existence of a further interpretative layer: under this establishmentarian veneer, a subtle criticism lies at the core of Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene. In this corpus, the author reveals the paradox inherent to the oxymoronic perception of actresses in early modern Italy—considered diabolic by some, divine by others—and censures the relativity in assessing their morality.

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[1] On the figure of Mary Magdalene in Andreini's works, see, for example, Fabrizio-Costa; Grazioli, "La figura di Maddalena"; Fiaschini 93–130.

[2] Mary Magdalene was sung by poets like Gabriello Chiabrera and Giovan Battista Marino; she was the protagonist of hagiographic accounts by Tommaso Garzoni and Serafino Razzi, a novel by Anton Giulio Brignole Sale, and religious plays by Castellano Castellani, Riccardo Riccardi, and Benedetto Cinquanta. On the fortune of the character of Maddalena in early modern Italian literature, see, for example, Testaferri; Marini. Among the many memorable portraits of Mary Magdalene produced in early modern Italy, I will mention at least Titian, *La Maddalena penitente* (Florence, Galleria Palatina), Rubens, *Cristo e i pentiti* (Monaco, Alte Pinacothek), Orazio Gentileschi, *La Maddalena penitente nella grotta* (Lucca, Pinacoteca Nazionale), Caravaggio, *Maddalena penitente* (Rome, Galleria Doia Pamphilj), and Domenico Fetti, *Melanconia* (Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia).

[3] Carlo Borromeo, *Homiliae*, qtd. in Taviani 33. Here and throughout, the term "Counter-Reformation" is used in a descriptive way, as the conventional periodization for a specific phase of the early modern period: the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century. The term, however, is the source of an ongoing terminology debate. For a summary of the debate, see, for example, O'Malley.

A sincere acolyte?

The dawn of the phenomenon now known as *commedia dell'arte* chronologically coincided with a period of moral rigour in Italy: the aftermath of the Council of Trent. Clerics felt a more pressing duty to defend the flock of believers from any attack on their morality. Professional actors were considered to be a threat. The critique of *comici dell'arte* (professional actors), however, hid more complex social issues. Theatre professionals were accused of illiteracy as they endangered the intellectual hegemony of aristocracy and clergy by writing and publishing their own works. They were condemned for the kind of entertainment they offered with their shows as it threatened the monopoly that Jesuits and academies had so far enjoyed in theatre. They were blamed for their nomadism, which, it was true, allowed them to evade taxation and accumulate some measure of money. They were accused of promiscuity because their mixed social interaction in the *compagnie* flouted social dictates in force in early modern Italy and were reproached for the primary social role actresses had in *commedia dell'arte* companies because it conflicted with the limited agency of women at that time. They were attacked for building their shows around the bodies of actresses because these women attracted monetary gifts from influential spectators and drained the finances of the *élites*.

In 1969, the Italian scholar Ferdinando Taviani collected and published passages from more than thirty treatises against professional actors as part of the monumental project of the Biblioteca Teatrale Bulzoni. The pages of Taviani's volume, an unsurpassed reference for an analysis of the reception of early modern actors, reveal that inglorious epithets were addressed by clerics to actresses in particular: inciters of lust, despoilers of Christian perfections, weavers of infernal webs, violators of spectators' chastity, inventions of the Devil, infectors of the world, prostitutes. These epithets, however, were countered by those attributed to actresses by some men of letters. Fascinated by the talents of these performers and willing to eulogize them, influential *letterati*, among them Torquato Tasso and Giovan Battista Marino, used Neoplatonic rhetoric to reverse this vilifying image of actresses. In their encomia, these *dive* lose any dross of diabolicity and are turned into instruments to reach God.[4]

Among the first *dive* to be praised by men of letters was Isabella Andreini (1562–1604). Francesco (1548–1624) and Isabella Andreini, parents of Giovan

[4] On the use of Neoplatonic rhetoric in encomia for actresses, see Laiena, "Incarnating the Ideal."

Battista, are the most famous performers in the history of *commedia dell'arte*. Members and then leaders of the *compagnia dei Gelosi*, they were among the first *comici* to realize the importance of defending their profession against the attacks of their detractors. Throughout their careers, they built a new narrative of professional performers as learned and honourable people. To rebut the accusation of promiscuity made against actors, they showed themselves as a respectable married couple, deeply in love and, with their seven children, willing to accomplish the Christian duty of child-bearing. To counter accusations of illiteracy, they wrote and published several texts, some of which, like Isabella Andreini's pastoral play *La Mirtilla* and her *Rime*, were successful in early modern Italy.[5] Isabella was the only *comica dell'arte* and one of the very few women to be awarded academic membership.[6] The measures taken by Francesco and Isabella Andreini pointed the way for Giovan Battista's strategy of manifest compliance with Tridentine ideals.[7]

Giovan Battista Andreini is the most important playwright in seventeenth-century Italy and one of the most prolific writers of early modern Europe (Ferrone 11). During his life, he composed fifty-seven texts, including plays, poems, and treatises, in a total of more than eighty publications, some with significant variants.[8] Through his writings, he set up a strategy of self-representation and marketing to counter the onslaught of the detractors on professional performers. Many of his works took a religious theme or figure as their subject. For this reason, some scholars have interpreted his career in a religious key and have defined him as a champion of the dialectic between theatre and Christian truth.[9] But it is hard to fully believe in Andreini's religious outburst.[10] In his works, seeds of subversiveness often lie buried underneath his apparent devoutness. The corpus on Mary Magdalene is an example.

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[5] On Isabella Andreini's promotion of conjugal love in *La Mirtilla*, see Coller.

[6] In 1601, Isabella Andreini became a member of the Accademia degli intenti in Pavia. On Andreini's academic membership, see, for example, Cox 134–38.

[7] On the influence of Isabella Andreini on Giovan Battista's career, see, for example, Ross, "Apollo in the Counter-Reformation."

[8] For a list of Andreini's works, see Burattelli 71–75.

[9] See Fiaschini; Majorana 380.

[10] Doubts on the sincerity of Andreini's devoutness are expressed also in Ross, "Playing Milan" 225–26.

Patent compliance

The six works published by Andreini on the figure of Mary Magdalene are a compendium of his strategies. In these texts, he defines himself as a performer and re-works in literary terms the debate on *comici dell'arte*. The image that Andreini fashions of himself is developed mainly on two complementary axes: first, he shows himself as an honourable actor, relying on the narrative set up by his parents; second, he shows himself as a devout actor, going beyond his parents' achievements.

According to Stephen Greenblatt, among the governing conditions of Renaissance self-fashioning was the creation of the Other: "self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (9). The threatening Other for Andreini, as for many actors willing to defend their profession, were the so-called "comici vili." These actors performed mostly in the *piazza*, entertained the common people, and exploited a comicality less elaborated and more vulgar and obscene. As opposed to the honourable *comici*, the "comici vili" were not engaged in enhancing the public perception of professional actors, nor were they concerned with setting up a strategy of self-fashioning to obtain social validation. In Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene, the polemic against "comici vili" is pressing. It is a way for the author to make the deeds of Isabella and Francesco stand out, by contrast.

In the opening of his 1610 poem *La Maddalena*,[11] Andreini placed a dedicatory letter by an unidentified Giovan Maria Pietro Belli, clearly a spokesman of the author, to Bartolomeo del Calice, a Venetian merchant.[12] In the letter, Andreini's theatrical journeys, as opposed to the wanderings of other *comici*, are considered an instrument to spread awareness of his talent as an actor and of his honour as a man:

[11] This essay will mainly focus on a close reading of the poem of 1610 and the play of 1617 as archetypes for the four works that followed. The paratext of other works included in Andreini's corpus on Mary Magdalene will also be taken into account.

[12] The exact identity of Giovan Maria Pietro Belli is still unknown. According to Fiaschini, Pietro Belli or, more likely, Pietrobelli, might have been a priest, because his name is often preceded by the title "don." On Pietro Belli and Bartolomeo del Calice, see Fiaschini 93–100.

> L'ore del viver suo giovenili spende con tanto onorato e religioso profitto, rendendomi certo che se questo va peregrinando per lo mondo con l'esercizio delle comedie, che non ci va ad altro fine se non perché molte parti intendino il suo valore circa la virtù sovra i teatri publici e l'onorato et accostumato vivere nel privato delle camere. (*LM*a 3v)

> He spends the hours of his young life with such honorable and religious profit, that he makes me sure that if he goes wandering the world playing comedy, he does it with no other goal but to make in many parts known the value he places on virtue in public theatres and an honorable and well-mannered life in private chambers.[13]

The distinction between Andreini and other professional actors is made even more evident towards the end of the letter, where Pietro Belli states that the author of the poem "non è un puro comico errante, ma uno che non ha altro fine che di virtù, e di mercar gloria" ("He is not a pure wandering *comico*, but he is one who has no other goal but to earn virtue and glory"; *LM*a 4v).

The contrast between the two groups of *comici* is the backbone of the letter to the reader written by Andreini at the beginning of the 1629 edition of the play. Among the reasons for the composition of the work, he mentions his wish to distance himself from "una certa setta di comici vili":

> Scrissila … per differenziarmi (la gloria de' buoni salvando) da una certa setta di comici vili, che 'nfelici al natale, miserabili ne' costumi, insoffribili ne' theatri, più per fame che per Fama le infelici arti e l'infelici case abbandonando, Sardanapali di bettole, et Orfei di tavole, sono ragione con le laidezze loro, di danneggiare la gloria di quelli che, più olio che vino consumando, cercano di mostrarsi conoscitori, e non abusatori, di quelle grazie che da i theatri derivano. (qtd. in Grazioli, "L'edizione viennese" 502)

> I wrote it…to distance myself (with the exception of the glory of the good ones) from a certain group of vile *comici*, who lowly in birth, miserable in customs, unbearable in theatres, abandoning unhappy

[13] All translations are my own.

> jobs and unhappy homes for famine more than for fame, Sardanapalus of taverns, Orpheus of tables, they, with their filthiness, are the reason why the glory of those is damaged, those who, by consuming more oil than wine, try to show themselves as experts in and not abusers of those graces which come from theatres.

Unlike the "comici poeti" (503), to whom Andreini himself belongs, the "comici vili" are "dissapidi" ("unlearned"), "stolidi" ("stupid"), "statue di brutto gesso" ("statues of ugly plaster"), "all'orecchio glocidanti rane, o crocitanti corbi" ("croaking frogs or cawing crows to the ears"), "piche" ("magpies"), "pappagalli" ("parrots"; 504), "scimmie imitatrici" ("mocking monkeys"; 506).

The creation of anti-models prepares the ground for Andreini's eulogy of his models: his parents. The discourse on honourable and vile *comici* in the letter to the reader of the play of 1629 ends with a tribute to the major representatives of his profession. Among them, Andreini mentions his mother Isabella Andreini, "della quale," he declares, "passerò come del mio genitore con silenzio, poiché tanto il mondo ne favella" ("as my parent, I will not say anything, because the world says much about her"; 506). The allusions to Isabella and Francesco Andreini in the works on Mary Magdalene go farther. In the dedicatory letter of the 1610 poem, Pietro Belli uses a passage of the Gospel to found the value of Andreini on that of Isabella and Francesco:

> *Non potest arbor bona molos fructus facere*, quinci anch'egli non poteva degenerare da quelle piante felici e feconde, una delle quali fu la morta immortale signora Isabella Comica Gelosa, e Accademica Intenta, e l'altra il Signor Francesco suo consorte Comico Geloso, celebri in vero per virtù e per nascita. (*LM*a3v–4r)[14]

> *Non potest arbor bona malos fructus facere*, therefore he, too, could not be worse than those fortunate and fertile trees, one of which was the late immortal signora Isabella Comica Gelosa and Accademica Intenta, the other was signor Francesco her spouse Comico Geloso, famous in virtue and in lineage.

[14] Pietro Belli considers Francesco Andreini as a descendent of the aristocratic family of the "Cerrachi di Pistoia hora detti del Gallo" (4r). On this matter, see Mazzoni.

Not only in the paratext of his works but also in the text Andreini alludes, though indirectly, to his parents. In the poems and in the plays on Mary Magdalene the mentions of the pious parents of the saint[15] are recurrent and instrumental: they reiterate the argument that Andreini's morality is validated by the virtue of Isabella and Francesco, just as that of Mary Magdalene is validated by the virtue of her parents. In the 1610 poem, to make the parallel even more clear, Andreini repeats the words of the Gospel used by Pietro Belli in the dedicatory letter and applies them to Mary Magdalene. The author here wonders how it was that the same parents gave birth to children as different as the sinner Mary Magdalene and the pious Marta and Lazzaro: "Com'esser può ch'arbor sì buona i frutti / faccia diversi?" ("How can it be that such a good tree produces / so different fruits?"; *LM*a 13v), and goes on in the octave that follows: "Hor dunque il regio ammanto / così degli Avi tuoi lordo si rende?" ("Therefore the royal mantle / of your ancestors is made so dirty?"; *LM*a 14r). The same point is made in the religious play of 1617. In act 1, scene 1, referring to the behaviour of Mary Magdalene, the pious Massimino declares: "E pur d'Eucaria è figlia / aquila a sì gran lampi, / onde Lazaro e Marta / s'abbagliar sì felici, / il retaggio materno a i rai provando" ("And yet she is daughter of Eucharia / eagle to such great lights / by which Lazarus and Marta / were so happily blinded, / proving the maternal heritage to the rays"; *LM*b 9–10). Andreini returns to the question of the parental legacy several times in the religious play: "Esortala de l'Alma a la salute, / e de' grand'avi suoi a premer l'orme, / né traviar da i genitori illustri" ("Exhort her to the salvation of the soul, / and to follow in the footsteps of her great ancestors, / and not to lead her astray from her noble parents"; *LM*b 11); "Movati almeno a generosi affari / de' tuoi grand'avi il sangue, / de' genitori il vanto, / di cui figlia io pur sono, Lazaro insieme" ("May at least move you towards generous matters / the blood of your great ancestors, / the merit of your parents, / of whom I am an offspring too, together with Lazarus"; *LM*b 70); "De l'immortalità figlio immortale / o d'Eucaria, e di Siro / piante già sì felici / fortunato rampollo" ("immortal son of immortality / of Eucharia and Siro / such happy trees / fortunate progeny"; *LM*b 132–33).

The distinction between "comici vili" and "honorati" was commonplace in the debate on professional theatre. Both *comici* and detractors reverted to it to respectively substantiate their apologetic and prosecutorial arguments. By linking this discourse to the eulogy of his parents, and by insistently placing his work

[15] According to the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacopo da Varagine, the parents of Mary Magdalene were Siro and Eucharia.

under the aegis "de' grand'avi suoi," Andreini presented a detailed professional profile of himself that took into account the accusations against *comici* but left no room for criticism.

The strategies examined so far aimed to define Andreini as an honourable actor. Through different strategies, Andreini defined himself as a devout actor, coming more directly to terms with Tridentine ideals.

The first edition of Andreini's religious poem was published together with the second edition of *La Divina Visione*, Andreini's eulogy to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo. *La Divina Visione* had already been published in 1604. By re-publishing it in 1610, the year of Borromeo's canonization, Andreini aimed to display his awareness of the latest happenings in the Catholic Church. In the dedicatory letter of *La Maddalena* of 1610, Pietro Belli's mention of Andreini's eulogy to Borromeo was complemented by allusions to two other of his religious works, which at that time were still in progress: "So eziandio che lo stesso s'affatica di ridurre in tre canti la vita di Santa Tecla vergine e martire, e m'è noto insieme che compone (se non l'ha finita) una rappresentazione in cinque atti, intitolata l'Adamo" ("I also know that he is labouring to adapt in three cantos the life of Saint Tecla virgin and martyr, and I am aware that he is writing (if he has not yet finished) a play in five acts entitled *L'Adamo.*"; *LM*a 3r). These four works—*La Divina Visione*, *La Maddalena*, *L'Adamo*, and *La Tecla vergine e martire*—make up Andreini's entire religious production between 1604 and 1623. By making Pietro Belli mention them in the opening letter of his poem, Andreini wanted to be presented as a religious writer more than as a *comico dell'arte*.

The titles of the six works on Mary Magdalene provide further evidence of the need of the author to display devoutness. They reveal a progression. The poem of 1610 is defined as a "*pia* compositione" ("*pious* composition"; *LM*a 3) and "*devoto* sudore di fronte onorata" ("*devout* sweat of honorable brow"; *LM*a 5) only in Pietro Belli's letter, but the poem of 1643 is defined as a "*divoto* componimento" ("*devout* composition") in its title. The same is true of the play: "sacra rappresentazione" ("religious play") in 1617 becomes "azione drammatica e *devota*" ("dramatic and *devout* action") in 1652.

The religious zeal of the author and his alignment with Tridentine ideals are conveyed not only through textual and paratextual references to his own spirituality; the plots of the works of 1610 and 1617 on Mary Magdalene, the archetypes for those that follow, are intended to promote some of the Tridentine doctrinal decrees. Andreini's accounts of the life of the saint are substantially articulated according to the canonical structure of the legend of Mary Magdalene, although

there are some ellipses and digressions.[16] After a customary proem, the poem of 1610 dives into an extensive narration of the dissolute life of Mary Magdalene "peccatrice" ("sinner"), which is interrupted by the report of her encounter with Christ. The metamorphosis of the sinner at the sight of the Saviour and her conversion are described in their physical and psychological effects through Mary Magdalene's discourses and actions. The life she led, portrayed in the first part of the poem, is reviewed by the protagonist with scorn, and the material objects she possessed are despised and disclaimed. Mary Magdalene wears sackcloth and goes to the house of Simon the Pharisee where, as narrated in the episode in the Gospels, she washes Christ's feet with her tears and asks for his mercy.[17] She starts a new life: the third and last canto of the poem recounts her perilous sea journey to France and her preaching in Marseille and Aix-en-Provence. The poem closes with the description of her hermitage in Sainte-Baume, where she dies, and with the account of the assumption of her soul into Heaven.

The plot of the play of 1617 stems from an episode that is usually secondary in the accounts of the life of the saint and is significantly expanded by Andreini: the narration of a dream Mary Magdalene had before her encounter with Christ. In the first part of the play, the prevalent emotion is the anguish this vision causes the saint: the account of her suffering is punctuated by the description of the attempts of her maids to soothe her and by comic episodes relating to the courtship of her lovers. Together with her maids, Mary Magdalene hatches plots at the expense of the suitors. Nevertheless, the anguish of the protagonist persists under this playful veneer and lasts until her meeting with Christ. The encounter triggers her conversion: Mary Magdalene decides to change her life and, here too, gives up all the things she previously possessed. The play ends with the ecstasy of the saint and her premonition of the Passion of Christ and of her hermitage.

Andreini devotes octaves 30–123 of canto 1, and octaves 5–45 of canto 2 of the 1610 poem to the episode of the conversion of Mary Magdalene. It includes

[16] In the tradition of Western Christianity, starting from Pope Gregory I, the figure of Mary Magdalene was born out of the conflation of three distinct female figures in the Gospels: Mary of Magdala, from whom Jesus expelled the seven demons, Mary of Bethany, Marta's sister, and the anonymous sinner who washed Christ's feet. Hagiographic accounts, then, related Mary Magdalene's vicissitudes as *apostola apostolorum*, her preaching, and her ascetic life in Sainte-Baume.

[17] See Luke 7.36–50 and John 12.1–8. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, the sinner pours perfume on Jesus's head, according to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. See Mark 14.3–9 and Matt. 26.6–13.

the narration of a sermon addressed by Christ to the crowds, which, as the Italian scholar Fabrizio Fiaschini points out, is developed as a catechismal lesson (109): the main principles of the Christian religion, from the Creation to the prophecy of the death and resurrection of Christ are reviewed in 12 octaves (*LM*a 21v–23v). This section of the poem was clearly written by Andreini in recognition of the recent regulations of the Council of Trent, introduced to foster the practice of catechesis in Catholic life. The construction of the episode of the conversion encompasses another reference to Tridentine resolutions. It is subdivided into three phases that reflect the phases of the auricular confession: *contritio, confessio*, and *satisfactio* (Fiaschini 109). Confession was laid down by the Council of Trent as one of the pillars of the Catholic faith, an indispensable instrument for the forgiveness of sins. The allusion to confession is even more evident in Andreini's employment of formulas typical of the sacramental praxis, like the anaphoric expression "Perdon Signor" ("Forgive me, Lord"), a *mea culpa* repeated by Mary Magdalene from octave 25 to 34, and her final request to Jesus, "Dimmi: Va' in pace, alcuno error non hai" ("Tell me: Go in peace, you have no sin"; *LM*a 35v), echoed later by the words of the Lord: "Tien le mie voci, e non peccar: va' in pace / ti fe' salva la tua fe' santa e verace" ("Keep my words, and do not sin again: go in peace / your holy and true faith saved you"; *LM*a 36v).

Andreini reiterates his compliance with Tridentine principles when he puts on stage the troubled awakening of Maddalena after her confused dream in the first act of the play of 1617. The protagonist recounts her nocturnal vision to her servants: in her dream, she envisaged the sun, symbol of Christ, and heard an appeal to change her sinful habits. The dream, though, is dismissed as meaningless by the servants (*LM*b 31) and, in a later scene, by Mary Magdalene herself (*LM*b 117). The misinterpretation of Mary Magdalene's prophetic dream seems to allude to the necessity of the mediation of clerics in the interpretation of God's word, as stated in the Council of Trent.

The definitive commendation by Andreini of the work of the Council is formulated towards the end of the first canto of the poem of 1610. Here, the sinner asks the Lord to give her precepts and regulations by which she might change her life:

> Tu detta le parole, e gli atti forma,
> ch'io per me stile havrei basso, e negletto;
> chiedo dal sermo tuo regola, e norma
> per accusar l'antico mio difetto. (*LM*a 27r)

You dictate my words, form my acts,
as I, on my own, would have a humble and neglected style;
I ask from your speech rule, and standard
to condemn my past deficiency.

Mary Magdalene's need for a "regola e norma" seems to coincide with the need for regulations to the lives of Catholic people, which was eventually met by the Council of Trent.

In light of the debate against professional actors, Andreini's self-fashioning as propagator and defender of the dispositions of the Council is further evidence of the elaborateness of his strategies.

Covered censure

Beyond Andreini's patent adherence to post-Tridentine etiquette, the works on Mary Magdalene hid a subtle criticism. They point out the paradox inherent to the oxymoronic perception of professional performers in early modern Italy.

Scholars have often interpreted Andreini's account of the history of Mary Magdalene as a metaphor for the history of professional performers.[18] The conversion that the saint undergoes might allude to the conversion of professional theatre, socially rehabilitated by a group of "comici virtuosi," like Andreini himself and his parents. This reading clarifies Andreini's stark condemnation of the "comici vili" and his references to the glory of his family and to his devoutness as an actor. More specifically, scholars have pointed out that Andreini's Mary Magdalene is an alter ego of the professional actress. This hypothesis is confirmed by many textual references, which will be considered here, and is further corroborated by Andreini's will to foster, through an elaborated artistic strategy, the identification of Mary Magdalene with the actor who played the role: his wife Virginia Ramponi (1583–c.1631).[19]

[18] See, for example, Zampelli; Fiaschini.

[19] This essay is concerned with textual strategies devised and adopted by Andreini in this corpus. The performative and artistic strategies set up in these works by Andreini, together with Ramponi, are analyzed in my forthcoming monograph, *The Theatre Couple in Early Modern Italy: Self-fashioning and Marketing Strategies*.

Both the poem of 1610 and the play of 1617 linger over the description of the dissolute life of Mary Magdalene before her conversion. In the first canto of the poem, she is pictured while surrounded by a crowd of lovers:

> Là fra turbe d'amanti e di desiri
> Maddalena movea superba il piede,
> quasi pavon, che gli aurei occhiuti giri
> spiega alhor più, che caldo Amor lo fiede;
> né così bella mai l'Aurora, od Iri
> scintillò vaga ne l'etherea sede,
> come costei, che in un bella, e lasciva,
> piagava ogn'alma, ed ogni cor feriva. (*LM*a 10r)

> There, in a multitude of lovers and desires,
> Maddalena superbly moved her foot,
> like a peacock who the golden, eyed feathers
> unfolds when a warm love wounds him;
> and never as beautiful Aurora or Iris
> wonderfully sparkled in the ethereal seat,
> as her, who at the same time beautiful and lascivious,
> wounded every soul, every heart injured.

The sensuality of Andreini's Mary Magdalene is subversive. It is unparalleled by other seventeenth-century literary representations of her. It rather resembles that of actresses. Like actresses who did "pubblica strage di chi la guarda" ("a public slaughter of those who look at her"; Segneri 451), Andreini's Magdalene is beautiful and lascivious, she wounds every heart and every soul. She is desired and praised just as early modern *dive* by their admirers. Mary Magdalene's lovers shower her with letters, jewels, and portraits of themselves (*LM*a 45r), just as admirers used to do with actresses.[20] The lovers are drawn to Mary Magdalene's

[20] In the words of the detractors, the reference to the gifts that actresses received from admirers is frequent: "Le belle comiche sono sovente lodate, favorite e talvolta sollecitate fino da personaggi di stima, e quasi violentate con donativi: che senza dubbio è occasion di molto guadagno a molte" ("These beautiful actresses are often praised, favored and solicited even by honorable people, and they are almost harassed with gifts. Gifts are an important source of income for them"; Ottonelli, qtd. in Taviani and Schino 163).

palace, where they "ben ama[no] entrar, ma non sa[nno] far partita" ("They love to enter, but they do not know how to leave"; *LM*a 24r): in the same way, admirers used to visit the "albergo" of the actresses[21] and were stricken by the departure of the *dive* from their cities.[22] Even the skills of Mary Magdalene are those of actresses: she sings, plays instruments, and "move in vaga danza il piede" ("She moves her foot in a beautiful dance"; *LM*a 12v).

The vicissitudes of the saint's life are organized by Andreini according to a structure that comprises a before and an after. The long opening account of Mary Magdalene's dissolute life before her conversion is balanced by the extended description of the events after it, both in the poem and in the play. The conversion itself is striking for its suddenness: there is no transition. Before and after, Maddalena is the same woman: she has the same body, although with significant changes in her aspect, and exercises the same fascination over others, although with a different purpose. The fact that the conversion lies at the centre of the structure of these works should not detract from the dualistic configuration of the texts. These moments and, in particular, Andreini's detailed description of the life of Maddalena as a sinner are significant in themselves. The dualistic structure leads to an interpretation of Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene both as his literary re-elaboration of the debate on professional actresses and as his criticism of the relativity in assessing actresses' morality.

As a sinner, Mary Magdalene is described by Andreini from a lexicon manifestly based on that used by detractors in their discourses against female performers. The analogy is striking. In the poem of 1610, while confessing her sins to Christ, Mary Magdalene portrays herself as a lascivious, vain, beautiful woman, a dangerous temptress. Her lust and her seduction emerge clearly: in her confession, she spares no details of the way she seduced men and of her sexual life.

> Perdon Signor, di tanti odori, e tanti
> preziosi licori, ove sovente
> in compagnia de' più lascivi amanti

[21] See, for example, the *Replica seconda* written by Leone de' Sommi in praise of the actress Vincenza Armani: "Quindi è che a gara i più bei spirti eletti / fanno all'Albergo suo riccorso ogni ora" ("Therefore, the most noble spirits, in competition against each other, / continually go to her abode"; Valerini 25v–26r).

[22] This is proven by the vast production of *addii* for *commedia dell'arte* actresses. On this matter, see, for example, the *addii* for the actress Virginia Ramponi in Laiena, "*Meretrices* ergo *dive*."

ignuda giacqui a la stagione ardente;
perdona se nuda tor mi tenni i vanti
ai più fini alabastri ancor possente;
perdon quando credei che la Natura
me sol fesse del bel legge e misura.

Perdon Signor, quando in notturno ballo
calamita fui d'occhi, error de' cori;
e quando là godea senza intervallo
mille amanti stancare, e mille amori.

Perdon Signor, quando tra fonti e fiori
io presi a inghirlandar garzon lascivo,
or tessendoli al crin silvestri onori,
or spruzzandoli il sen co'l fresco rivo;
perdon quando al meriggio i gravi ardori
con l'amator di libertà già privo
schivando, il braccio e'l sen nudo scopersi,
ed a lui pronta ogni diletto offersi. (*LM*a 35r)

Forgive me, Lord, the many perfumes and many
precious liquors, when often,
in the company of the most lascivious lovers,
undressed, I lied at the ardent season;
forgive me if naked I thought I was capable of
taking merit away from the finest alabasters;
forgive me, when I thought that nature
had made me the only law and measure of beauty.

Forgive me, Lord, when in a nightly dance
I was a magnet for eyes, a sin for hearts;
and when I there unceasingly enjoyed
exhausting a thousand lovers, a thousand loves.

Forgive me, Lord, when among springs and flowers
I started to adorn with a garland a lascivious boy,
now weaving into his hair sylvan honors,

or splashing his breast with fresh water;
forgive me, when in the afternoon the grave ardors
with the lover already deprived of his liberty
avoiding, I discovered my arm and my breast,
and to him I readily offered every pleasure.

Mary Magdalene is even worshipped by her lovers in the same way the *dive* were worshipped by their admirers.[23] Andreini emphasizes this side of the life of the sinner, defining her as a "profane priestess":

Perdon, s'al tempio andai con voglia insana
non d'adorar, ma d'essere adorata,
ove sacerdotessa ancor profana
mille cori piagai di strali armata. (34v)

Forgive me, if I went to the temple with an insane desire
not to adore, but to be adored,
where, as a profane priestess
I wounded a thousand hearts armed with arrows.

Mary Magdalene's review of her past is especially powerful in the religious play. Here, she defines her previous self through a series of epithets. The list sounds like a blasphemous reversal of the *Litaniae Lauretanae*, which were very well-known to professional actors.[24]

La seguace d'amanti,
la fugace d'onori,

[23] In a sonnet written by members of the Accademia degli Intronati for the actress Vincenza Armani, the authors wonder: "Qual meraviglia or è, s'ella ha il valore / delle Dive celesti e de gli Dei, / s'altri vinto riman, s'altri l'adora" ("What is the wonder, if she has the virtue / of heavenly Goddesses and Gods, / if one is won by her, if one adores her?"; Valerini 17v).

[24] The *Litaniae Lauretanae* were approved only thirty years earlier, in 1587, by Pope Sixtus V with the Bull *Reddituri*. In his *Supplica*, the actor Nicolò Barbieri wrote: "molti [comici] avezzano le loro creature a dire le letanie di nostra Signora ogni sera" ("Many *comici* educate their children to say the litanies of Our Lady every evening."; Barbieri, qtd. in Marotti and Romei 667).

la superba, la vana,
…
Quella vaga di schiere,
quella avara de l'oro,
quella pania de' cori,
quella rete de l'alme,
quella peste d'Amore,
l'ingannatrice Sirena,
la Cerasta, la iena,
la furia, al fin l'Arpia. (*LM*b 147)

The follower of lovers,
the avoider of honors,
the superb, the vain,
…
that thirsty of crowds,
that greedy of gold,
that trap of hearts,
that web of souls,
that plague of Love,
the enchantress Siren,
the snake, the hyena,
the fury, finally the Harpy.

Even the reaction of the attendants to the supper in the house of Simon the Pharisee, their way of "alzar le mani ed inarcar le ciglia" ("Raising their hands, arching their eyebrows"; *LM*a 28v), recalls the reaction of disparagers to the presence of professional actresses.

These works record not only the stand of moralists in the debate on professional theatre, but also that of men of letters. After her conversion, Mary Magdalene loses neither her beauty nor her Eros: they are re-semanticized and readdressed to the spiritual world. The Mary Magdalene who emerges from the conversion is like the actress who emerges from the Neoplatonic encomia written by men of letters. Both retain their characteristics, which are now, or are now perceived to be, in the service of God. The parallel appears clearly when comparing passages of Andreini's works on the saint with poems by academicians in praise of actresses.

In a poem written by Francesco Vinta, *principe* of the Florentine Accademia degli Spensierati, the actress Virginia Ramponi is presented as a stairway to Heaven. Through her extraordinary eloquence ("con soave metro alto parlando"), she tempers people's desires with reason, mitigates their passions, and fosters the ascension of their souls to God:

> Ma con soave metro alto parlando,
> tenea con leve freno
> l'accesa brama alla ragione in seno
> e de' soverchi desideri umani
> sì fatte quete le tempeste orrende,
> rendea gli erti sentieri umili e piani
> per cui l'anima a Dio rapida ascende. (*Rime* 8)

> But with sweet meter highly speaking,
> she kept, with light reins,
> ardent desire within reason,
> and of excessive human desires
> made the horrible storms quiet,
> she made humble and plain the steep paths
> through which the soul rapidly ascends to God.

Likewise, in his works on Mary Magdalene, Andreini presents the saint as a means to conversion. After devoting her life to Christ, Mary Magdalene, like the actresses in the encomia, arouses in those who surround her a desire for God. The converted Mary Magdalene still wins people's souls, but now she wins them to Christ: "A quel tacito impor tutt'è fastosa, / d'haver per Christo a vincer alme, e cori" ("To that silent order she is very joyful / that she has to win souls and hearts for Christ"; *LM*a 38r). Andreini's Mary Magdalene is like Ramponi:

> Questa è colei, che d'alto foco accensa
> fa che d'amor l'aer d'intorno avampi;
> quasi specchio, che 'n sé la luce immensa
> del sole accoglie, e fuor ne vibra i lampi;
> già di là parte con gran cura intensa
> di far, che Christo in ogni cor si stampi;

e ne l'incendio di celesti ardori
tragga (fenice in Dio) l'ore migliori. (*LM*a 50r)
This is the one who, inflamed by a high fire,
ensures that the air around her burns;
as a mirror, which the immense light of the sun
in itself receives, and gives the flashes back;
from there she leaves, committed with great care,
to make sure that Christ leaves a mark on every heart;
and that in the bonfire of celestial ardors
it has (phoenix in God) the best hours.

Her "performance" of her new way of life transforms souls and leads her lovers to follow her example, in accordance with the theatrical precept of mimesis. In act 5, scene 2 of the play of 1617, one of Mary Magdalene's lovers exhorts his former rivals to change their lives as Mary Magdalene changed hers, and to imitate her:

S'ambi vaghi già un tempo
fummo di sue divise,
di suoi fior, di sue piume,
e perch'oggi non lice
s'ella cangia vestir, cangiar noi mente,
anzi dal capo al piè tutta imitarla? (*LM*b 172–73)

If we both once were
longing for her dresses,
for her flowers, for her feathers,
then why can't we today
if she changes dresses, change our thoughts,
and imitate her from head to toe?

The exhortation is echoed by a choir of angels in the closing scene of act 5. Their words are a take-home message for the spectators: "Vanne tu, cangia vita / la peccatrice imita" ("Go, change your life / imitate the sinner"; *LM*b 227). The idea recurs in the poem of 1610, where the narrator notes with wonder the effects that the vision of the converted Mary Magdalene provokes in her "rio stuolo amante":

O meraviglia, quel rio stuolo amante,
che pria franco seguilla, hor ciò vedendo
paventa in ricalcar l'humili, e sante
orme di lei, che van Giesù seguendo. (*LM*a 38v)

Oh marvel, that sinful loving crowd
that earlier intrepid followed her, now, by seeing this
is hesitant to follow in the humble, and holy
footsteps of her, which follow Jesus.

Mary Magdalene's power after the conversion is no different from the power of actresses: her gestures, her *actio*, and her oratory seduce souls and lead them to virtuous behaviour.

The Italian scholar Luciano Mariti defined Andreini's *La Maddalena* of 1617 as a "dramma del corpo" (453), arguing that in this, more than in any other play by Andreini, the body acts as a catalyst of theatrical actions. The body is, indeed, at the centre of Andreini's works on Mary Magdalene. As shown, however, in these texts Andreini acknowledges that even the function of the body may change, going from being a trigger of sexual desire to a spur to the true faith. As a consequence, the drama of the body becomes the drama of perception and relativity, a censure to the absurdity of the Manichean position in judging early modern actresses. This is stressed by the many oxymoronic expressions used by Andreini to define the protagonist. Mary Magdalene is the "peccatrice santa" ("holy sinner").[25] She is "già peccatrice, or Diva" ("once sinner, now divine"; *LM*a 9v). She is "specchio hor di Lucifero, hor di Cristo" ("mirror now of Lucifer, now of Christ"), "dannata e beata" ("condemned and beatified"), "diabolica gli angeli spaventando, angelica i demoni fugando" ("diabolic, when scaring angels, angelic, when making demons flee").[26] She is "tanto or sacra quanto già profana / donna" ("as sacred now as then profane / woman"; *LM*a 65r). The polarized nature of the character is more explicitly used by Andreini to allude to the relativity in assessing actresses' morality when the author compares Mary Magdalene to a mirror that manifests Hell or Heaven depending on the way it is facing: "Maddalena, specchio alla torbida face d'inferno opposto, o come tetro: ma da l'empireo sole percosso, o quanto

[25] *LM*b, dedicatory letter to Pico della Mirandola, unnumbered page.

[26] *LM*d quoted in Grazioli, "L'edizione viennese" 501.

di celeste splendore lo stesso sole vince, et abbaglia" ("Maddalena, mirror of the turbid flame of Hell, but, when touched by the empyrean sun, oh how much it outshines the sun itself in celestial splendor and more than it she blinds").[27] In the same way, according to the perspective from where they were observed, whether that of the detractors or that of the promoters, actresses were considered to turn the minds of the spectators to either Satan or God.

The choice of Mary Magdalene as the subject of this corpus of works, far from being a mere adherence to post-Tridentine thematic convention, is revealing of Andreini's versatile mind. The complex structure built by the author allows the coexistence, within his texts, of different, even opposing messages, expediently displayed or hidden. The "chiaroscuro antitetico" ("antithetic chiaroscuro"; Getto 77), quintessential of the figure of Mary Magdalene, made her the perfect character to convey Andreini's censure in the folds of his blatant devoutness.

University College Dublin

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[27] *LM*d qtd. in Grazioli, "L'edizione viennese" 501.

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