

WOMEN OF PASSION: MARY OF MAGDALA

Creative interpretation and explanatory notes

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I depicted Maitland's story very literally, with Mary clutching her veil and her head slightly bowed in grief and thought. The image itself is very plain with minimal details and a white background. I chose to do this so that the image of Mary is the sole focus. Maitland's interpretation follows Mary at Christ's crucifixion, as she reminisces about the events that occur in Matthew 26: 6-13.

Above Mary's head is the word WANTON, an adjective often associated with Mary. The very act of Mary letting her hair down and being seen in public without a veil is in itself considered a wanton act. A wanton woman is sexually unrestrained and promiscuous, and in Maitland's interpretation, Mary speaks of describing herself as wanton as well as others describing her as wanton, a sinner, and a prostitute. But Mary also speaks of Christ loving her regardless, saying that she is 'a loving woman... He had liked her... He found her beautiful, he found her wise, he found her funny.' and helps her learn that 'there is no need to wash away the past... there is no need to apologise for an unloved childhood; for poverty and beatings...'. Both the yellowish colours and the shape of the word WANTON above Mary's head lend themselves to the appearance of a halo. I included this aspect to show that while Mary has been branded as a wanton and a whore for her past, she is still considered a saint and a good person in the eyes of the Lord, and that is how she is remembered in the present and that it is not despite her past, but rather because of it.

Mary wears a vivid blue and shapeless dress. Blue is a clothing colour frequently mentioned in the bible. Although Mary is not mentioned explicitly as wearing it in Maitland's interpretation, blue is also a colour that Jesus' mother, Mary, is often depicted in blue, and I decided to extend that to Mary Magdalene. My main reason for this was that blue would have complimented Mary's 'extraordinary red-gold' hair, but I'm not sure if it would be accurate to the bible. Mary's hair is very important in the story, and it is described as extremely beautiful, and, by letting it out of her veil, she is, 'announcing to all the world that she is a wanton, a whore'. Mary does this partly to share the humiliation Jesus has to face while being crucified, and, she hopes, that if he can register seeing her hair, it will remind him of the better times they shared. However, Mary also does this because she is proud of her hair and its beauty. In the evening, her hair will be long enough and beautiful enough to protect Christ's mother from touching his wounds, and she is proud of her hair for being able to serve Christ in its own way.

The scarf Mary clutches is bloodied, as are her hands and robe. The blood running down Mary's hands, robe, and veil are all metaphorical, and represent a physical manifestation of the humiliation she bears parallel with Jesus. The blood running down her hands are meant to be as if she herself is being crucified, and she has nails imbedded in her palms. The blood on her veil is a physical manifestation of the abuse she's endured while being branded as a

wanton and a whore. Nonetheless, Mary clutches the physical manifestation of the abuse she's endured to her chest, it is a material reminder of the past that she has learned to accept and be proud of with Jesus' help. As he is being crucified, it is a lasting material reminder of all that Christ has done for her.

The final aspect of my image is the yellowed grass at Mary's feet. Surrounding her are purple flowers (they're not great but I did my best). As the grass grows further and further from her feet, the purple flowers disappear. Purple flowers are commonly associated with royalty and pride— which is a term used towards the end of Maitland's interpretation, but has its essence threaded throughout the story. Christ has taught Mary to be proud of herself and to take pride in her past. Mary resolves to never wear a veil again, because she is proud of her hair, hair that is 'long enough, beautiful enough to cover his wounds this evening so that his mother will not have to touch him'. The flowers at her feet are representative of the ability to be proud of herself and her past, an ability that Christ has given her. The flowers gradually disappear as the grass moves away from Mary because it is a representation of *her* pride, and doesn't extend to the other bystanders not depicted in the image.

Olivia, in your painting and your commentary on it you have captured the emotional complexity of the relationship between Mary Magdalen and Jesus and contrasted it to the rather one-dimensional traditional picture of Mary as a sinner-turned-saint. In this your reflection is a perfect complement to Sara Maitland's story.