



Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England (The Middle Ages Series)

Theresa Coletti

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A sinner-saint who embraced then renounced sexual and worldly pleasures; a woman who, through her attachment to Jesus, embodied both erotic and sacred power; a symbol of penance and an exemplar of contemplative and passionate devotion: perhaps no figure stood closer to the center of late medieval debates about the sources of spiritual authority and women's contribution to salvation history than did Mary Magdalene, and perhaps nowhere in later medieval England was cultural preoccupation with the Magdalene stronger than in fifteenth-century East Anglia.

Looking to East Anglian texts including the N-Town Plays, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, *The Revelations of Julian of Norwich*, and Bokenham's *Legend of Holy Women*, Theresa Coletti explores how the gendered symbol of Mary Magdalene mediates tensions between masculine and feminine spiritual power, institutional and individual modes of religious expression, and authorized and unauthorized forms of revelation and sacred speech. Using the Digby play *Mary Magdalene* as her touchstone, Coletti engages a wide variety of textual and visual resources to make evident the discursive and material ties of East Anglian dramatic texts and feminine religion to broader traditions of cultural commentary and representation.

In bringing the disciplinary perspectives of literary history and criticism, gender studies, and social and religious history to bear on specific local instances of dramatic practice, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints* highlights the relevance of Middle English dramatic discourse to the dynamic religious climate of late medieval England. In doing so, the book decisively challenges the marginalization of drama within medieval English studies, elucidates vernacular theater's kinship with influential late medieval religious texts and institutions, and articulates the changing possibilities for sacred representation in the decades before the Reformation.

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